

THE RESURRECTION OF MISS CYNTHIA

BY FLORENCE · M · KINGSLEY



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**THE RESURRECTION
OF MISS CYNTHIA**



“‘No—No!’ whispered Miss Cynthia, with a frightened little shiver; *‘not next summer!’*”

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THE RESURRECTION OF MISS CYNTHIA

BY
FLORENCE MORSE KINGSLEY

AUTHOR OF
THE TRANSFIGURATION OF MISS PHILURA
THE SINGULAR MISS SMITH, ETC.

WITH FRONTISPIECE
BY MARTIN JUSTICE



NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

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Published, September, 1905

To My Friend

EDWIN MARKHAM

*To whose inspirational utterances
concerning the life that now is, the author
owes certain cheerful and enlivening
ideas which appear in humbler
guise in this book*

MISS CYNTHIA DAY had lain broadly awake on her smooth, lavender-scented pillow since the first gray twilight of dawn, her thoughts busying themselves fretfully with the events of the previous day.

The events in question appeared conspicuously important to Miss Cynthia. For one thing, she had visited her dressmaker and found the fit and finish of her new silk gown entirely unsatisfactory. This was a regular annual occurrence, and therefore quite to be expected, but Miss Cynthia had not found it the less irritating on that account. She had entered upon the customary discussion of remedial measures with Malvina Bennett with a suppressed exasperation which bordered upon vulgar ill humour. The stupidity and incompetence of Miss Bennett appeared almost criminal when considered in conjunction with the shining breadths of silk entrusted to her hands.

"Malvina is *not* to be trusted," Miss Cynthia told herself, with a firm tightening of her small mouth.

Dismissing for the moment the professional pecca-

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dilloes of the dressmaker, Miss Cynthia entered upon an exhaustive mental inspection of her wardrobe, in the course of which she decided to purchase "a really good tailor-made dress" in one of the big department stores of Boston. It was to be feared that this expenditure (necessitated by Malvina Bennett's inexcusable carelessness) might carry her perilously near the rigid bounds of her self-imposed allowance. Miss Cynthia knew, of course, that the income from the accumulated Breyfogle and Day properties was more than amply sufficient for her needs. She was also complacently aware that only quite common and vulgar persons (notably devoid of ancestors) expended all they could conveniently lay hands upon; conversely, the less of an ample income one employed the more dignified and well-bred the individual.

Such elective and therefore patrician economies had invariably distinguished the members of the Breyfogle family. Miss Cynthia had early acquired the conviction that she was not an exception to the rule. She reflected that it was hardly necessary to impress the advantage of frugality upon Abby Whiton. Abby had lived in the family as maid of all work for

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more than thirty years and was thoroughly conversant with the Breyfogle methods of administering a kitchen. Nevertheless, Miss Cynthia decided to look a little more carefully after the soap and drippings. There were certain other snug retrenchments which she contemplated with a satisfaction which for the moment cleared the anxious puckers from her small, colourless face.

The tailor-made gown should of course be black. Miss Cynthia had worn black continuously since the days of her young girlhood, when the successive funerals of a large and elderly family connection had occurred with monotonous frequency. "I despise black clothes!" she had once declared rebelliously, thereby shocking the surviving elderly relatives into an unending series of dreary homilies which she had found even more depressing than the hated black dresses.

Miss Cynthia scarcely ever thought of her shadowy young self nowadays; when she did it was with a feeling of quiet satisfaction in the changes which the passing years had wrought. The last funeral had occurred more than five years since; there was, there-

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fore, no mortuary reason (as Malvina Bennett had frequently urged) to prevent Miss Cynthia from wearing colours. But she still chose the handsome black gowns which intimated not too obtrusively her lone condition in the world, wearing them with a certain pride in her loyalty to the unyielding customs and opinions of her dead mother.

Mrs. Day had been the last to join the silent company in the family burial-plot, and the gloom of her austere, hard-featured personality seemed still to linger like an actual presence about the stiffly furnished rooms of the old Breyfogle house. Miss Cynthia was acutely aware of it, and she had continued to yield to it an unquestioning obedience down to the smallest details of her small round of daily existence. She was anxiously careful of her clothes, of her expenditures, of her weak health, of her religious beliefs, and she had become increasingly solicitous in her efforts to preserve the grim, immaculate order of furniture and fittings in which the late Mrs. Day had taken what might be termed her one pleasure in life—if words so warm and human may be used to describe an emotion so frozen, so colourless.

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The small, uneven trickle of Miss Cynthia's thoughts mounted at length to the level of the attic, where at the bottom of a certain hair trunk, sacred to the memory of her Grandfather Breyfogle, reposed several neatly labelled boxes of hereditary dress-trimmings. She wondered with feverish intensity whether a set of jet medallions (carefully wrapped in tissue paper and bestowed in the lower left-hand corner of the green box) would be too "dressy" a garniture for the front of her new silk waist. The jets would partially conceal, she reflected, the ravages of Malvina Bennett's unthinking needle. On the other hand, the medallions had once belonged to her Grandmother Breyfogle; her mother, she remembered, had always considered them too handsome and too expensive to use. Miss Cynthia finally rejected the idea of the medallions in favour of some well-mended black lace, at present doing duty on a best dress about to be degraded to second wear.

The vision of the hair trunk had subtly suggested the annual spring house-cleaning. It was already April, and Miss Cynthia had not cleaned house. She fidgeted uneasily upon her pillow as she called to

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mind her mother's spare, active figure in grim pursuit of imaginary dust and cobwebs amid the rigours of March weather. To clean house at a season of the year involving positive personal suffering had appealed to the martyr spirit which dominated Mrs. Day's New England conscience. In view of the strenuous past Miss Cynthia experienced a real and poignant remorse at the thought of her own sinful laxness.

A certain dull, teasing, persistent little pain which had haunted her of late made itself felt more sharply than usual, as if offering itself in guise of a more or less valid excuse. Miss Cynthia turned on her pillow with a sigh, and the movement brought into the range of her short-sighted blue eyes a flat, thin book with marbled board covers which lay upon the table in close proximity to her Bible. It was, in fact, the official record of minutes of the Ladies' Aid and Missionary Society of the Innisfield Presbyterian church, of which Miss Cynthia was a member in good and regular standing.

At a meeting of the society held the previous afternoon Miss Day had been unanimously elected secre-

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tary, in place of Mrs. John Puffer, resigned. The newly-elected officer had become almost instantly aware that Mrs. Puffer's book of records was in a disgracefully untidy condition. It was indeed actually moist and sticky. Miss Cynthia had grave reason to suspect that the Puffer twins had recently consumed bread and jam in its immediate proximity. To be sure, the biennial new baby had but lately arrived in the Puffer household, a fact which had been duly advanced by a sympathetic matron to account for the resignation before noted, and other phenomena, including bread and jam in unlooked-for localities.

Miss Cynthia's maiden imagination hovered in wordless indignation about the Puffer menage for a brief space, then reverted to her own more engrossing affairs. She consulted her Grandmother Breyfogle's watch which ticked feebly in its thin, pale case beneath her pillow. "I think," she said aloud, "that I shall go to town to-day."

She continued to plan the details of a somewhat tedious shopping expedition as she completed her toilet, selecting each garment with careful reference

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to the capricious April morning which gloomed and sparkled outside the closed sash of her window. A robin in full tide of jubilant mating song swung in the budding branches of the old apple-tree in the garden below. Violets were unfolding their young leaves from the cold, wet earth. An adventurous daffodil flaunted its yellow skirts in the brisk wind. Miss Cynthia's faded blue eyes were riveted upon the open page of her Bible. "A broadcloth is far handsomer than a serge," she was thinking; "but it doesn't wear nearly as well."

"Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord!" she read, and wondered if fringes were still worn, and if they were less expensive than applique. She sank to her knees and repeated certain familiar prayers in a busy whisper. When she arose she had decided to purchase a serge with stitched taffeta trimmings.

This and other matters were presently noted in due order upon a neat tablet of memoranda. As Miss Cynthia's pencil primly dotted the last period the teasing, familiar pain again clamoured sharply for recognition beneath the stiff trimmings of her rigid

little bodice. She hesitated for a fraction of a minute then added a line to her list. "If in neighbourhood of Plymouth Street, consult the doctor."

"I suppose it will be a foolish waste of money," she thought, as she stepped noiselessly down the thickly-carpeted stair. This prudent reflection concerned itself directly with the projected call at the doctor's office. Miss Cynthia was thoroughly accustomed to slight, dull pains in various parts of her body, and these with the sense of lassitude which frequently overtook her of late she was in the habit of referring to the "delicate health" which all lady-like persons, particularly of the Breyfogle connection, cherished as an integral element of their genteel breeding. Miss Cynthia had already experienced a large number of interesting maladies, and these, with the differing complaints of various friends and relatives, had furnished her with much food for thought, as well as for conversation of a gentle and desultory character.

Miss Cynthia invariably referred to the "Breyfogle constitution" with a sort of reverence, as to something rare and precious which had been be-

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queathed to her by a singularly fortunate and distinguished ancestry. There was also the intricate "Day constitution" to be taken into account. Miss Cynthia vaguely recollected that her great-aunt Serena Day had frequently complained of a sensation similar to the one with which she herself was growing unhappily familiar. Involuntarily her fragile little hand sought the unyielding perpendicular of her corset-steel with the gesture of the long-departed Aunt Serena. "It is just here," whispered Miss Cynthia to herself; "and it goes through me like a red-hot knitting needle." This had been Aunt Serena Day's picturesquely dreadful descriptive phrase. Miss Cynthia adopted it with peculiar satisfaction. "Just like a red-hot knitting needle!" she repeated, as she stepped from the last stair.

There was a lonesome, penetrating smell of well-rubbed, heavily-upholstered old furniture and carpets, religiously preserved from the direct rays of the sun, in the lower regions of the house, which might have suggested hastily opened doors and windows to a less conservative person. Miss Cynthia was hardly

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aware of it; her delicate little pointed nose (the Breyfogle nose) recognised merely the familiar hereditary atmosphere, as thoroughly characteristic, and quite as much a matter of course as the orthodox family opinions on everlasting punishment and the state of the saved after death.

She paused on the threshold of the parlour, wondering weakly whether it would do to leave the carpets down for another season. "No one ever comes in here to sit down, except when the minister calls," she told herself. The stern, wooden countenance of Grandfather Breyfogle, in gown and bands, and the prim, simpering glance of Grandmother Breyfogle (wearing the jet medallions) seemed to focus a strong family disapproval upon her shrinking little figure, as she raised her eyes timidly to their tarnished gilt frames, swathed funereally in yellowing tarlatan.

"Of course," she murmured apologetically, "I shall try to do my duty."

This stern, but depressing, resolution remained with Miss Cynthia during the entire day. One's duty, as she conceived it, being invariably at odds with one's

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inclination, she purchased a frankly ugly gown and an unfashionable hat, lunched dyspeptically on lemon pie and weak tea, and finally found herself waiting her turn for an interview with the silent, melancholy assemblage of persons usually to be found in a doctor's reception room.

The doctor was a big, bluff, red-faced man, with a certain defiant cheerfulness of manner. He prided himself on the fact that he never prevaricated facts pertaining to life and death for the benefit of his patients' supposed sensibilities. He regarded the human body as a vastly complicated and interesting machine, meriting, but seldom receiving, the most careful and systematic attention of its owner. He was frequently incensed with the silly women who came to him to be rid of their self-induced complaints, and he made little effort to conceal his feelings.

He stared keenly at Miss Cynthia when she had seated herself in his presence with a timidly ingratiating air. "Yes," he said shortly—after she had spoken with becoming dignity of the exceeding delicacy of the Breyfogle constitution and of the intri-

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cate and uncommon maladies incident to the Day constitution. "I remember both you and your folks very well indeed. Heard your Grandfather Breyfogle preach on hell when I was a boy." He made a wry face at this, as if unexpectedly compelled to swallow a dose of his own medicine. "Haven't been to church since." After a thoughtful pause he added abruptly, "Hope you haven't inherited his insides, madame."

Miss Cynthia compressed her small mouth. "I am said to be very like my Grandfather Breyfogle," she said primly.

The doctor busied himself with listening intently at the back and front of Miss Day's attenuated little figure. "Humph!" he ejaculated. "How old are you?"

Miss Cynthia hesitated for the fraction of a second. "I am thirty-three," she said in a low voice.

"I should have said ten years older," commented the doctor, with professional rudeness. "Well, it doesn't matter."

Miss Cynthia stared at him with vague dismay. "I thought perhaps I needed a—a tonic," she said

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at last. "Something bitter, or—I have taken six bottles of Scoop's Vegetable Herb Compound since last fall," she concluded somewhat proudly. "It was recommended to me."

The doctor shook his head compassionately.

"You should have attended to this before," he said slowly. He squared his broad shoulders; then broke into a short, impatient laugh. "About a hundred years before," he added, under his breath.

"What—what do you call my complaint?" inquired Miss Cynthia. "Do you—consider—it serious?"

"Do you want me to tell you the truth?"

"That is why I came to you," she said. She sat quite erect in the straight-backed chair, her little feet scarce touching the floor, her short-sighted blue eyes fixed on the doctor's face. "I shall be obliged to you," she added with careful dignity, "if you will acquaint me with my exact condition. It is, I think, more important to me than to—anyone. There is—no one else—to whom it matters."

Miss Cynthia's erect little figure did not waver during the somewhat halting explanation which made her

grim future clear to her. Her hands, folded primly in her lap, did not tremble. "I shall live—only one year," she said slowly. "That is what I understand—*one year*. Am I right?"

The doctor's big face had grown pale, almost ashamed. "I—I am sorry," he stammered, with a curious embarrassment. "Perhaps I should not have told you so—er—plainly. But——"

Miss Cynthia arose with a certain definiteness of manner. "I am glad I know," she said simply. "I—thank you for telling me. It was right that I should know."

II

THE late afternoon sunshine flickered coldly across the grim headstones which marked the last resting place of Samuel Hastings Day and Susan Maria Breyfogle, his wife. To Miss Cynthia, stumbling weakly through the sodden grass, they appeared in stony guise of her parents, waiting stiffly and with inexorable patience for her to join them.

She remembered dully that they had always waited for her thus. After church of a summer's evening when other girls were loitering happily homeward, arm in arm with the red-cheeked village beaux, she had walked primly between her father and mother, listening to the endless antiphonal discourses with which they strove to seal her young ears against the allurements of the world. Thus early had she been led to differentiate between the inordinate desires of the carnal or fleshly nature and the unyielding demands of Deity, which might readily be recognised in that they were invariably distasteful.

The conscientious Mrs. Day had earnestly striven

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to bring up her one child in what she was pleased to term "the nurture and admonition of the Lord," the worthy woman's interpretation of this Scriptural phrase being at once simple and ingenuous. The resulting discipline consisted mainly in ascertaining the natural desires of the girl's heart for the purpose of thwarting them.

Once a courageous youth had ventured to walk home with Cynthia Day from school, leaving her at the gate with a lingering hand-clasp, which Mrs. Day at the window above witnessed with tightened lips. The girl had gone into the house, her face bright with youthful blushes, to endure the cold displeasure of her mother's eyes. "I do not approve of *boys*," Mrs. Day had announced, with a withering accent of finality. "I cannot *allow* you to have anything to do with *boys*."

But the boy had continued to defy the disapproval of the matron. Miss Cynthia drew her breath sharply as she thought of him now. It was in such young April weather as this that she had said good-bye to him for the last time. Perhaps he had not really cared. Perhaps he had forgotten. She had

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never known. It was, after all, only the pale shadow of a love affair; but she remembered it with singular vividness as she stood looking down at the narrow, sunken space between the graves. This was her place, reserved for her. And she was coming to it—soon.

She sank weakly down on the iron bench, set for the cold comfort of mourners, mechanically lifting her black skirt from contact with the ground. "My stone will stand just there," she said aloud, pointing with her tremulous little finger. "It will be white and new. It will say, 'Cynthia Breyfogle Day, aged thirty-four. Only daughter of Samuel Hastings Day and Susan Maria Breyfogle, his wife. Died April——'"

She broke off with a short, sharp cry of utter rebellion. "I can't die! Oh, God! *I can't die!*"

A bluebird perched on the fence near by burst into a low gurgle of happiness, the blossoming maples tossed their scarlet fringes against the darkening sky. Miss Cynthia had slipped from the iron bench and lay in a huddled heap upon the wet earth, where the new grass was pricking greenly through the

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year's dead growth. She was sobbing wildly, like a hurt child. "I've always tried to do just what you wanted me to," she whispered, "and now—and now it's almost over!"

She realised—as she lay there prone against the unanswering stone—something of the pitiful futility of her life, something of its starved littleness. She wondered dully why she had lived at all. Why, —having lived uselessly—she must die—unsatisfied. Her broken thoughts struggled weakly to rise to the barren heaven of the apocalyptic vision, inhabited largely (she supposed) by the blameless Breyfogle and Day family connection. She strove to picture herself robed in white and wearing large, inconvenient wings, eternally occupied in playing a small, shining harp.

"I don't want to die!" she whimpered childishly. "I don't want to die!"

She decided at length that the inscription on the tombstone should read, "Cynthia Breyfogle Day, *beloved* daughter of Samuel Hastings Day and Susan Maria Breyfogle, his wife."

"I should like," she murmured, "to have people

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think that somebody loved me, once." She lay quite still after this, wrapped in a dim dream of the long, peaceful days when the stone would be telling its brief story, and she—would be sleeping beneath it.

A drop of warm rain, shed like a tear from a great gray hurrying cloud, fell gently against her wan cheek. "*The beloved daughter*," whispered Miss Cynthia, smiling piteously to herself. "They will think, perhaps, that I loved somebody—once."

The prattle of shrill, childish voices close at hand mingled confusedly with her dream. It seemed to her that she was once more a child, hungrily watching other children at play across the hedge. Her mother's voice was calling insistently, "Come, daughter! You must come in now; it is time to go to bed."

"Yes, mother," she answered drowsily, "I'm coming!"

She rose stiffly to her feet, dimly conscious that the rain was falling steadily with a soft patter on the gaunt stones and leafless shrubbery. A pink and yellow sunset shot long, dazzling beams

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through the warm mist. The friendly bluebird, perched on the topmost twig of a tall evergreen, repeated his rapturous exclamation again and again. A redbreasted robin darted through the chill, wet air with loud, cheerful calls to his flying mate. Miss Cynthia felt strangely young and light of heart as she walked slowly among the graves.

"Why, it—it's—beautiful!" she said in a surprised little voice.

She almost stumbled over two small figures cuddled snugly under the shelter of an overhanging bush. She stopped and regarded them attentively. They stared back at her from innocent, wide eyes. "It's raining," said Miss Cynthia, with a vague smile. "You will be quite wet if you stop here."

"We don't care," piped a little voice, "we like to be out in the rain. 'Sides, there's goin' to be a rainbow. We like rainbows."

"But why did you come here?" asked Miss Cynthia, slowly recognising the Puffer twins. They wore no hats, and their red hair stood out in a sort of aureole about their round, freckled faces.

"Because it's a hill," answered the child promptly.

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"We always come up here to see rainbows. What did you come for?"

Miss Cynthia lifted her wan face to the shining sky.

"I came to see a rainbow," she answered. "Yes, that is why I came—to see a rainbow."

"You're getting pretty wet," observed one of the little girls, after a wondering silence. "Why do you stay here and get wet?"

Miss Cynthia laughed weakly. "I never got wet before in my life," she said. "I think—I like it."

The child stared hard at the little draggled figure. "I guess we'll go now," she said at last. "P'raps you'd better come too. Do you want to take hold of han's?"

"Yes," said Miss Cynthia eagerly, "I'd like to take hold of hands."

"We most always run when we take hold of han's," piped up the other child, with a twittering laugh. "It's lots of fun if you don't fall down an' skin your knee. I guess you can't run very fast, though."

The soft, warm hands of the two children seemed to send thrills of a strange, new life into Miss Cynthia's chilled body. She found herself presently at the foot

of the little slope, panting and breathless. It occurred to her that she had just passed through the most exciting experience of her life. "I never ran down hill before," she gasped.

"Why didn't you?"

"Because my mother was afraid I'd tear my dress," replied Miss Cynthia, promptly and truthfully.

"I guess you did tear it," said the child doubtfully. "I heard something rip behind. Will anybody scold you?"

"No," said Miss Cynthia firmly. "I shan't even scold myself. It won't make any difference," she added in a low voice. "I'm glad I tore it."

She was, in fact, aware of a keen and peculiar satisfaction which held her warmly fast like the hands of the Puffer twins. She yielded to it without question. "It is only for a year," she told herself. She looked down into the upturned faces of the twins with a faint smile. "It's nice out of doors to-day, isn't it?"

"It's always nice outdoors," said one of the children seriously; "but it's nicer when it's pleasant. We're going after wild flowers to-morrow."

"I wish——" began Miss Cynthia. Then she

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stopped short; she remembered the belated house cleaning.

"We're goin' to bring apples an' bread an' butter, an' eat 'em in the woods," continued the little girl, sucking in her moist, red lips with anticipatory relish. "It's lots of fun to have picnics. We have 'em 'most every day in summer. Do you like picnics?"

"I never went to a picnic but once," said Miss Cynthia soberly, "and that was a long time ago." She hesitated, while a faint flush tinged her pale cheeks. "I—I've got some big, red apples at my house," she said slowly, "and—and some red-raspberry jam."

The children stared at her in wondering silence. "We like jam," sighed one. "'N every bit of mother's jam is et up."

"If I could go after wild flowers with you, and—and—— Would you let me go with you?" Miss Cynthia's voice trembled with eagerness.

"Would you bring lots of jam on bread an' two red apples apiece?"

"Yes, I would."

"An' a basket to dig roots? We're makin' a garden. Have you got a garden?"

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“I’ve got some rosebushes and peonies in my yard,” said Miss Cynthia doubtfully, “and I guess some daffodils.”

The twins giggled and shot guilty glances at one another. “We didn’t know you liked little girls,” said one presently. “Our mother said you didn’t; she said we mustn’t go in your yard. But we did. We picked two daffodils ’ithout askin’. Our mother said you wouldn’t give a single one of your flowers away.”

Miss Cynthia’s lips trembled. “I do like little girls,” she said, in a small, weak voice. “I never knew very many. I always had to stay in my own yard. But——” Her head was lifted with a resolute air—“I’m not going to stay there any more.”

The children looked interested. “Why not?” they demanded.

“Because I’m tired of it,” said Miss Cynthia definitely. “You can have all my daffodils, if you want them.”

“All right,” said the Puffer twins, with cheerful unanimity. “We’ll come an’ dig ’em up to-morrow.”

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"I thought you were going to have a picnic?"

"We are."

"When?"

"In the mornin', maybe. 'Are you comin'?"

"If you'll let me," Miss Cynthia said joyfully. She suddenly decided that she would not clean house any more. "I don't want to clean house," she said aloud.

"We think it's fun," observed the twin who spoke oftenest.

"Fun?" echoed Miss Cynthia weakly. "*Fun*—to clean house?"

"Uh-huh, heaps of fun! We like to rummage in old trunks an' boxes, an' pull things about."

Miss Cynthia remembered the plethoric boxes in her attic. "I've got a good many things," she said soberly. "But I never thought it was fun to pull them about. I—I never pulled them about."

"Why not?"

"I don't know," said Miss Cynthia doubtfully. "Perhaps I was afraid to."

"We aren't afraid," said the talkative twin calmly. "We've got to go in now. I guess supper's ready,

an' we're hungry. We'll come to your house to-morrow an' dig those daffodils."

"Don't forget," said Miss Cynthia.

She felt suddenly old and very, very tired when the children had dropped her hands and dashed with a cheerful whoop into the rather untidy Puffer doorway.

Her wet skirts dragged heavily about her tired ankles and her head ached. "I suppose," she thought drearily, "that I have taken cold. But—it won't make any difference."

There was real comfort in the idea. She walked more briskly as she approached her own gate. "I don't care if I am wet," she told herself. "I shall get wet whenever I choose. I might as well."

The stooped figure of a woman clad in rusty black and bearing a large flat parcel was fumbling with the latch. She looked up with a little apprehensive cough at Miss Cynthia's approach. "I'm reel glad you're home," she said eagerly. "I jist brought your dress over to try on."

"How do you do, Malvina?" said Miss Cynthia, opening the gate. "Come in, won't you?"

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“I’ve tried reel hard to fix that dress waist jest as you wanted it,” quavered Miss Bennett, with an anxious smile. “An’ I’m most sure the skirt ’ll hang reel pretty now ’at the gethers is changed. I hope it will, anyhow. My! I ain’t hardly slep’ nights, I’ve been so worried ’bout it.”

Miss Cynthia regarded her strangely. “It doesn’t make any difference about the dress,” she said slowly. She was thinking confusedly that Malvina Bennett looked old and worn. She was painfully thin, too, and her breath came in little gasps. “Have you had supper?” she asked suddenly.

“Why, no, I ain’t—not yet,” Miss Bennett told her, with a startled look. “As I says to mother, I want to fin’ out if the waist is a good snug fit before I stitch up them under-arm seams agin—I’m bound I’ll git that wrinkle out ef it kills me! You know you said you’d got to have the dress before Sunday. An’ I thought mebbe ef I set up kind of late, I c’d——”

“Come in,” said Miss Cynthia urgently.

A feeble light burned in the chill darkness of the front hall. Miss Cynthia shivered as she glanced

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about her. "Come into the sitting room," she said quickly. "We'll—we'll have a fire and some hot supper."

"My land!" ejaculated the astonished seamstress under her breath.

"Abby!" called Miss Cynthia.

The door of the kitchen flew open, and a tall, spare-skirted figure appeared outlined against the gloom beyond. "Yer supper's ready," said the woman, recognising her mistress with a deliberate sniff like that of a sagacious dog. "You c'n set right down an' eat 's soon 's ye'r min' to."

Miss Cynthia hesitated, then she straightened her little figure determinedly. "Malvina Bennett is going to have supper with me," she said. "Make some hot toast, Abby, plenty of it, and open a jar of preserves. And yes, we'll have the cold beef, too. I'm going to change my dress before tea, Abby, and I wish you would light the fire in the sitting room and bring another lamp. I want it to be warm—and—and *light*."

"I do hope you ain't a-goin' to no extry trouble fer me," piped Miss Bennett timidly. "I'd reely no idee

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of stayin' to supper; all I wanted was to git that dress waist——”

Miss Cynthia smiled in a preoccupied sort of way. “Sit down,” she said gently. “There isn't so very much time, you know, and I've always wanted to have it warm, and—and *light*. It isn't pleasant like this, is it?”

The woman in the kitchen door turned a stupefied stare upon her mistress. “*Toast!*” she repeated, “an' *another lamp*—an'—an' a *fire!* You ain't cal-c'latin' to burn them nice, round logs your ma kep' fer looks, be you? You ain't a-goin' to burn 'em *now?*”

“Yes,” said Miss Cynthia, with an obstinate tightening of her little mouth. “I'm going to burn them now—to-night.”

When she came downstairs, trailing her best silk gown behind her, she found Malvina Bennett hovering over the timid flame which seemed to hesitate about attacking the well-preserved logs. “The chimbley don't seem to draw reel good,” ventured the dressmaker, casting sidelong glances of uneasy interest at her hostess. “These 'ere cert'nly do look to be awful nice, even sticks to burn.”

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"Well, I sh'd think es much!" chimed in Abby Whiton, setting down the tongs with a disapproving thump. "An' I guess you disremembered that the meat man don't call agin tell Sat'day. We'll hev to save the cold beef fer to-morrow's dinner."

"We can have chicken to-morrow," Miss Cynthia said recklessly. "Anyway, I want the beef for supper. Bring some kindling, Abby; I want this fire to burn bright. I want a big, warm fire."

The old chimney yielded its accumulated damp with difficulty; but at last the flames roared cheerfully up its wide throat. Miss Cynthia sat before the purring logs with a satisfied little smile on her lips; her blue eyes beamed with childish delight. "It looks," she said softly, "just as I always thought it would. After this—I mean to have a fire whenever it is cold. Isn't it pleasant, Malvina?"

Malvina Bennett had enjoyed her supper thoroughly. She had been hungry and tired, and the hot tea and toast and the generous slices of cold meat had warmed her into a semblance of cheerfulness. "I don't know as I ever see anythin' nicer," she sighed happily. "My! I never sh'd ha' thought o' sech a thing as

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stayin' here to supper!" She might have added that no one else in the village of Innisfield would have thought of it, either. The old Breyfogle family had never been famed for its hospitality.

"I like company," observed Miss Cynthia, after a little silence. "I always wanted to have company."

"Did you?" murmured Miss Bennett wonderingly. "Mebbe you won't like the way I fixed them pleats behind," she went on, with an uneasy glance at the flat paper parcel which lay unopened on a chair. "I guess I'd ought to git right to work, if I'm goin' to finish it by Sat'day night. The's an awful lot o' fussy work on them bias folds, to git 'em to lay reel nice an' even."

"I don't want the dress Saturday," said Miss Cynthia dreamily. "I sha'n't need any more dresses."

Miss Bennett's worn lips quivered. "I wish you'd jest take a look at it," she faltered wistfully. "I've took an awful sight o' pains with the waist. I s'pose you've gone an' bought a ready-made dress in Boston, an' don't care no more fer my sewin'. I've always been 'fraid you would."

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Miss Cynthia bit her lip. "I didn't mean that, Malvina," she said, after a pause. "I only meant that you needn't hurry. You—you look tired. I—I'm sorry I found so much fault with the dress—was it yesterday? It seems like a long time ago—a long time ago. I'll look at the dress, of course. Yes, that's beautiful. It's just as I wanted it. Sew it up as it is. And—and I'll pay you for it to-night."

Miss Cynthia sat by her fire for a full hour after her guest had left her. She wondered vaguely what she could have done or said to make Malvina Bennett so strangely happy and excited. Why, she had actually cried when she said good-night. "I feel's if I'd never reely knowed you all these years," she had said. "I'm s' thankful I come over. I was s' awful upset an' worried 'bout the dress I couldn't sca'cely eat my victuals. 'N' now, seems 's 'o everythin' was changed."

The last words echoed in Miss Cynthia's ears. "Why not?" she thought aloud. "My life has all been of a piece, so far, and now—there's only—one—year—left."

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She went to bed and dreamed that she was a little, red-cheeked girl, wearing a pink dress with ruffles which flew wide in the warm wind as she ran down a long, green hill, taking hold of hands with the Puffer twins.

III

THE cold, dun clouds, which had seemed to waver and lift a little the night before, had settled heavily upon Miss Cynthia with the morning light. She was thinking drearily of shrouds and coffins and funeral hymns, as she sipped her weak coffee from the cracked cup which Abby Whiton had carefully washed by itself for twenty years. The fire on the hearth had burned out, and the gray ashes stirred uneasily as the spring wind whined in the chimney.

“Well, of all the impident young ones *I* ever see, them Puffer twins is the beatenest!” Abby Whiton set down a plate of pallid doughnuts before her mistress with her customary definite thump. “I sent ’em a-flyin’, though, with a flea in their years! What you s’pose they was doin’?”

Miss Cynthia started to her feet, a pink flush staining the wan whiteness of her cheeks. “The Puffer twins, did you say?” she demanded excitedly. “I had forgotten all about them. Where are they? I want to see them!”

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"Home, I sh'd hope, by this time," said Abby tartly. "They was diggin' up your posies as cool as cow-cumbers; they sez——"

"I told them they might—Oh, Abby!"

That estimable person stared in open-mouthed astonishment at sight of her mistress running bare-headed through the chilly April morning.

"Wait!" she was calling shrilly after the two little hurrying figures. "Wait for me!"

The Puffer twins did not wait; they only ran the faster, and defiantly clanged the latch of their own gate in Miss Cynthia's face as she came up panting and breathless. "It was all a mistake," she managed to say. "I forgot to tell Abby about the daffodils. She didn't know."

The twins stared at her in resentful silence through the pickets of the gate.

"Won't you come back with me and get them?" implored Miss Cynthia, with heartfelt distress. "Then—there is the picnic, you know."

The tallest twin nudged her sister and giggled. "We told our mother 'bout the red apples an' the jam," she said at last. "'N' ma, she said she guessed

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we'd been listenin' with our elbows. She said you never gave anythin' away if you could help it."

Miss Cynthia looked from one to the other of the two children, a painful lump rising in her throat. "Oh!" she said weakly, "I—I *do* want to give things away; I always wanted to. Won't you come and get the daffodils—*please* come!"

The gate swung open tentatively.

"Please come," repeated Miss Cynthia humbly. She smiled wanly as she held out a blue little hand to each of the children. "I like to take hold of hands," she said.

Abby Whiton was standing at the side door, shading her astonished eyes with her hand, when the three came into the yard. "Fer *goodness* sake!" she ejaculated, "what in under the sun's got int' *her*?"

She kept peering out of the window in the intervals of gathering the breakfast dishes together, while Miss Cynthia and the two children busied themselves in the weedy little border. They were undoubtedly digging up the daffodils. The next time she reconnoitred she beheld her mistress coming slowly toward the

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house, closely followed by the twins, who trampled recklessly upon her unguarded skirts.

“Come right in!” said Miss Cynthia hospitably.

Abby Whiton presented a warlike front on the threshold. “They ain’t a-comin’ in here *one step* tell they’ve wiped their feet *good!*” she announced. “Fer the lan’s sake! jest look at the mud! What you s’pose your ma’d say to them feet on her carpets?”

Miss Cynthia did not seem to hear; she opened the door wide. “Come in—please!” she entreated. “I’ll get the apples right away, and the jam.”

Abby Whiton shut her thin lips together firmly while her mistress hastily opened a jar of the precious red-raspberry jam. “Cut some slices of bread, Abby, and bring up six of the biggest apples you can find,” said Miss Cynthia hurriedly. “We’re going on a picnic.”

“*On—a-picnic!*” repeated Abby shrilly. “Well, of all the redic’lous idees! I’d planned to begin house cleanin’ to-day; I guess we’ve put it off a’ready ’bout as long as decent folks kin. The’s all them trunks to go through in the attic, an’——”

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"I'm not going to clean house this spring," faltered Miss Cynthia, trembling guiltily under the severe scrutiny of the woman's eyes. "I—I'm tired of staying in the house all the while, and—and doing the same things. I've decided to have a picnic 'most every day after this. You can wash the windows, Abby, or do anything you like; but I——"

"Well, I want-ta-know!" ejaculated Abby Whiton. She clattered down the cellar stairs in a whirlwind of righteous indignation, muttering ominously to herself.

Miss Cynthia, with a frightened, flushed face, crept into the sitting room, whence issued the sound of excited giggles. The twins had climbed upon two chairs, and were staring at their distorted reflections in the old-fashioned mirror above the mantel piece. "It makes us look funny," exclaimed one of the twins, clambering briskly down at Miss Cynthia's approach. "Did you ever look in it?"

"Yes, I have," said Miss Cynthia, with a depressed sigh; "but I never thought it was funny."

"Well, it *is* funny," said the child positively. "It makes us laugh. Come on, Ed; I guess we're goin' now."

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Miss Cynthia looked weakly astonished. "I thought her name was——"

"It's Edwina," giggled the little girl, "and mine's Harriet. But our pa calls us Ed and Harry 'most all the time. He says we're 'most exactly like boys, so we might as well have boys' names. What's your name 'sides Miss Cynthia?"

Miss Cynthia blushed delicately. "Once—a long time ago, somebody called me June," she said, as if talking to herself. "He—said I looked like—just like a lovely day in June, when the roses were in blossom. He called me that—*June Day*. It was so long ago that I had forgotten it, till—yesterday. Then I remembered about it!"

The children were regarding her attentively. They said nothing.

Miss Cynthia fidgeted uneasily under the gaze of their candid brown eyes. "I don't suppose," she murmured, "that I look like that—now."

"We think you'd look some better if you were fatter," said Harriet doubtfully, "an' if you had on a pink dress, an' if your hair was curled."

"Here's your apples," snapped Abby Whiton,

thrusting her hatchet face in at the open door. "But of all the fool doin's *I* ever heerd of—— You'll ketch yer death o' cold fer one thing. This ain't no time of year fer eatin' victuals outdoors."

Miss Cynthia was packing the sandwiches and apples into a little splint basket. "Of course I shall wear my rubbers, Abby," she said with dignity. "Besides, I—I don't care if I do take cold. I shall take cold if I wish!"

It was surprisingly pleasant in the April woods. The pale sunshine flickered cheerfully through the leafless branches and lay in warm patches on the wet, brown leaves and sodden mosses. The Puffer twins screamed with delight at sight of the first downy-stemmed hepaticas, clustered bluely at the foot of a giant beech. "Don't pick 'em," cried Harriet, hurling herself bodily upon her eager sister. "Let's let *her* have 'em; we'll find some more. Look! there's white ones over there! An' I'm most sure I c'n smell arbutus!"

Miss Cynthia was on her knees beside the nodding blue flowers. "Oh!" she murmured. She touched the dainty things with her pallid little fingers, a soft

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rapture of happiness thrilling her through and through. She did not pick them.

The children returning with blossom-crowded hands stood quite still and regarded her curiously. "She's just a-lookin' at 'em," whispered Harriet. "She hasn't picked one."

"I guess she thinks they're most too pretty to pick," said Edwina, with a little sigh of understanding.

"More likely she's thinkin' 'bout the apples," said Harriet with a practical air. "She looks pretty hungry, anyway, an' I'm most starved."

Nobody in either the Breyfogle or the Day families, as far as Miss Cynthia knew, had ever been hungry for their food. She was entirely familiar with certain unpleasant sensations at the pit of her stomach, to which it had been her habit to refer as "my faint spells." That these "faint spells" frequently pre-faced one of Abby Whiton's pallid meals served in the curtained gloom of the Breyfogle dining room, Miss Cynthia was well aware; but she had never mistaken them for common, vulgar appetite. She observed the rapturous looks of anticipation on the

round, freckled faces of the children with astonished interest.

"Hm-m-m!" sighed the twins in soulful concert, as their sharp, white teeth sank juicily into the shining sides of two red apples.

"Do they taste good?" asked Miss Cynthia incredulously.

"Uh-huh," assented Harriet, with wordless satisfaction. "Why don't you eat yours?"

Miss Cynthia bit timidly into one of the rosy spheres. "I neglected to bring my fruit-knife," she murmured apologetically; then quite forgot how "unlady-like" it was to bite an apple in her amazed enjoyment of its novelty.

"We'd better save the rest till we're hungry again," observed Harriet frugally. "It's an awful long time till this afternoon, an' we'll be most starved time we get up on Byer's hill. There's heaps of wintergreens up there, and they'll be chuck full of berries. Come on; let's hurry!"

It was a long tramp through briar-set pastures and scrubby woodlands; there were high rail-fences to climb over, and shallow brooks to cross on slippery,

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round stones. Miss Cynthia's unaccustomed little feet ached cruelly; her breath came in hurried gasps; but she doggedly followed the indefatigable twins, who skipped over the ground like a pair of red squirrels.

Edwina's quick, brown eyes were the first to observe her distress. "Why, you're gettin' real tired, aren't you?" she asked kindly.

Miss Cynthia's lips quivered; her eyes filled with a sudden rush of childish tears. "I—I'm afraid I can't—go much farther," she faltered. "My side aches so, and——"

"It's your clo'es," pronounced Harriet briefly. "You can't run an' climb fences when you 're a lady. Sometimes we play lady on rainy afternoons; but we're are n't ever goin' to be truly ladies. 'Tisn't any fun. You c'n sit down here an' rest, an' we'll go up on the hill an' get the wintergreens; after that we'll go home. We'll bring you some of every single thing we find—cross our hearts we will!"

Miss Cynthia sank tremulously down upon a particularly damp and mouldering log which one of the twins kindly pointed out. It was so delightful to merely rest that she drew deep breaths of satisfaction.

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Presently she recalled the fact that a meeting of the executive committee of the Ladies' Aid and Missionary Society had been appointed at her house that afternoon. Consulting her watch she found that it would be impossible to reach home in time to receive the committee. She reviewed the correlated facts with dreamy indifference. Abby Whiton would open the door, she knew. She would, in all probability, tell the committee about the Puffer twins digging up the daffodils; also, she would describe in detail the preparations for the picnic, concluding with a spirited account of her own subsequent industries and anxieties. Abby Whiton was quite as well known and respected in the community as any one of the matrons who formed the committee, hence her account of the singular doings of Miss Cynthia would merit, and receive, the gravest consideration.

Miss Cynthia contemplated, as in a vision, the solemn consternation of Mrs. Buckthorn, and the wondering astonishment of the others. It did not appear to her as at all important.

She presently forgot the meeting altogether, as she rose uncertainly to her feet and strolled away from the

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neighbourhood of the damp log, leaving the little splint basket behind her.

The remark of Mrs. Puffer, as truthfully reported by the twins recurred to her mind. "I never thought much about giving my things away," she said to herself. "We never gave things away at our house. Grandmother Breyfogle used to say it wasn't so much charity with most folks as it was pure laziness. She said it was easier to pack a lot of stuff off onto other shiftless folks than it was to take care of it. But there is no use for me to keep things now. I may as well give everything away."

Unconsciously she had walked faster and faster as she pursued this course of reminiscent reasoning. Having arrived at its simple conclusion she stopped short and looked about her. The open pasture had gradually given place to a thick, solemn-looking wood. Ground-pine and russet mosses, elastic and fragrant, stilled the sound of her little feet. There was a subtle, alluring sweetness abroad, mingling with the spicy breath of the trees. Miss Cynthia's short-sighted blue eyes wandered hopefully to a steep bank covered with brown leaves and the discarded needles of

the great pine trees which stood guardian above it. Once, a long time ago, she had run away from school on an April day—with *the boy*. And on a bank like this—her eager fingers stirred the withered leaves—they had found—— Oh, the young rapture of it!

The wild fragrance swept her faded cheek like a caress. She cried aloud with the ecstasy of her discovery—arbutus, pink and white like a baby's palm, folded close in rosy buds, opened wide like white stars. Her sombre little world disappeared in a rose-tinted mist of happiness; pain, disappointment, loneliness, the long shadow of approaching death—all was forgotten in the delightful, the satisfying vision of the moment.

And always just beyond stretched another starry slope, or a bank yielding pinker and more odorous buds. She bound the flowers into great bunches and swung them upon her arm that her hands might be empty for more. Then the gentle madness passed, and by slow degrees she realised that the bright afternoon light had faded, and that a lonely little wind, presaging rain, was beginning to cry among the tree tops.

Miss Cynthia called aloud upon the Puffer twins in a

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shrill, frightened voice; then she hurried through a rough pasture, leaving bits of her black gown on the clutching briars, only to find her way barred by an unfamiliar stone wall.

On the farther side of the road was a narrow and very muddy road, which seemed to Miss Cynthia's tired eyes to stretch away up to the lonely sky in one direction, and to lose itself in a gloomy wood at the other. She weakly adventured herself upon the stone wall, but the stones slipped uncertainly beneath her tired feet. Then she sat down and wept large, childish tears of pure fright and fatigue.

IV

THE melancholy procedure of shedding tears is frequently followed by a definite and cheerful reaction. This doubtless accounts for the fact that many persons of a weak and lymphatic disposition are prone to indulge in what has been aptly termed "the luxury of grief." Miss Cynthia, after crying helplessly for perhaps five minutes, again addressed herself to the task of surmounting the stone wall. This time she succeeded and landed on the other side, breathless and tremulous with her unwonted exertions.

The intermittent creak and rattle of wagon wheels reached her anxious ears from beyond the brow of the hill. Presently the wagon itself hove into view. The single brown horse which drew it pounded heavily down the long, muddy slope, his course being controlled by a ruddy-cheeked young man in blue overalls who sat on the high seat. A long step-ladder protruded from the back of the vehicle and an alert-looking collie trotted briskly at the wheel.

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Miss Cynthia instinctively clutched at the friendly wall. She ardently wished that she had not climbed over; it now seemed impossible to climb back, besides, the alert collie had already spied her. He dashed forward with loud, excited barkings. Miss Cynthia screamed. She was very much afraid of dogs, and this particular dog was spattered with mud to the tip of his curly tail. "Go away!" she cried weakly. "Oh, what shall I do! Go away!" The muddy dog had planted a proprietary paw on the skirt of her gown and was snuffing his find with a doggish grin of satisfaction.

The young man drew up his clumsy horse with a loud "Whoa!—Here, Rover, you rascal! Down, sir, down!" he commanded. "He won't hurt you, ma'am," he added, staring curiously at the shrinking little figure flattened thinly against the stone wall.

"I—I've lost my way, I think," said Miss Cynthia, striving vainly to regain her vanished dignity. Fresh tears clouded her blue eyes, and she was obliged to wink fast to keep them from falling down her cheeks. She was in the habit of distrusting strange men quite as deeply as she did dogs, and indeed had

vaguely associated both with those lines from Revelations which refer to the unfortunates shut out from the celestial city as "dogs and sorcerers and whoremongers and whosoever maketh and loveth a lie." The late Mrs. Day had once inscribed this passage of Scripture upon a thin strip of paper, and after reading the sounding words with an awful voice had snipped them into small, square pieces and compelled her child to swallow them one by one. It was this novel and imposing punishment for a very small lie which formed the unassailable basis of Miss Cynthia's opinion of dogs and men.

This particular young man was looking at her very kindly and reassuringly out of a pair of honest gray eyes; as for the muddy collie, he had retreated to a position behind his master and was also eyeing her in a speculative, but entirely friendly manner.

"I think I know you," said the young man, in his pleasant, deep voice. "You are Miss Day of Innisfield. My name is George Blossom; I'm sorry to say I've frequently stolen apples off the sweeting tree back of your barn, when I was a boy. How good they were, to be sure, and how indignant the tall woman in

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a purple calico gown used to be when she caught us, which wasn't often."

"I suppose you mean Abby Whiton," said Miss Cynthia, in a depressed voice. "She's nearly always indignant about something. How—how far is it to Innisfield, and which way must I go to get there?"

"It's a matter of three miles to the village, Miss Day," the young man told her, "I'm going home myself, and if you won't mind riding in my wagon I shall be glad to take you. It will be easier than walking, anyway."

"I haven't any idea where the twins can be," sighed Miss Cynthia; "they may be looking for me." Then, seeing the puzzled look in the young man's eyes, she entered into an explanation of some length concerning the picnic, and the wintergreen hunt, and of how the little splint basket, containing three red apples and six slices of bread and butter, had been left by the log. "I forgot how late it was growing after I found the arbutus," she finished. "I haven't seen any before in years."

The puzzled look had only deepened as she went on with her halting little story. But the young man

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laughed outright when she mentioned the Puffer twins. "I'll risk Ed and Harry Puffer in any part of the country," he said. "They'll probably go straight home after they've eaten up everything in the basket. You'd better get right in with me and go to the village. We'll stop at the Puffers' on the way and see if the children have come."

He lifted Miss Cynthia to the high seat of the wagon, and they were presently rattling down the muddy road behind the big brown horse at what seemed a reckless rate of speed.

"I've just finished a job," observed George Blossom, by way of making conversation. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder in an explanatory manner which seemed to include the long step-ladder and a half dozen of sticky pails which danced noisily on the unsteady bed of the wagon. "I'm a painter and paper-hanger by trade," he went on, with a scowl which looked decidedly out of place on his ruddy, good-humoured face.

Miss Cynthia had surreptitiously attached herself with barnacle-like firmness to the low rail which surrounded the wagon seat on one side, and to George

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Blossom's coat on the other. She was really afraid she might fall off in some mad, unexpected plunge of the stolid, brown horse; and this fear of the animal had in great degree lessened her apprehension of the man who drove it. "Don't you think we—we're going pretty fast?" she faltered, as the wagon wheel lurched violently over a stone.

"Why, perhaps we are," said George Blossom, pulling his horse to a walk and glancing quizzically down at the small, scared face by his side. "You are n't used to driving, I reckon?"

"Not—not exactly. I've ridden in carriages, though, a good deal to—to funerals. That seems different, you know; you can't see the horses for one thing, and they generally go nice and slow."

"Yes, I guess it is, quite different," agreed the young fellow soberly. Then his eyes twinkled. "You've got a big house, Miss Day; did you ever think how scrumptious it would look if you had it all painted up outside? Say a light, steel gray; or a white, with a green trim and green blinds; then for inside work, I've got paper that can't be beat; white grounds with roses running all over 'em as natural as life, or floral

stripes, or bunches of different sorts of posies tied with pink an' blue ribbons—oh, they're great! I wish you'd give me the job of fixing up your place."

"I never thought of doing anything to the house," said Miss Cynthia meditatively. "It's always looked just as it does now since I can remember. Grandfather Breyfogle had it papered when he was married. The papers were all very nice and expensive; that on the parlour walls cost four dollars a roll. It was imported from England."

The young man whistled. "I'll bet I could put you up something twice as pretty for—say seventy-five cents," he hazarded. "You want white paint rubbed down to an ivory finish for those old-fashioned rooms, and something light and handsome for the side walls. I've just been doing up Mrs. Scott's parlour and dining room—the parlour in kind of a soft, dull green, and the dining room in blue and white. Then I did Miss Rosalie's rooms. Gracious, if they ain't pretty! I wish you could see them!"

"I remember Rosalie Scott," said Miss Cynthia, with a reminiscent frown; "she always used to giggle out loud in sermon time. Once I gave her a head of cara-

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way, and she pulled it to pieces and stuck the seeds all over Deacon Scrimger's coat in a sort of pattern. Her mother never once looked that way, though I should think she'd have expected 'most anything of Rosalie."

The young man threw back his head and laughed heartily. "I guess Mrs. Scott didn't want to bother Miss Rosalie as long as she was quiet," he said. "She was a regular mischief when she was little. She's come back from boarding-school now, to stay, and she—she's *just beautiful!*"

The young man's tone was so earnest and heartfelt that Miss Cynthia felt a sympathetic thrill. "I'd like to see her," she said, almost eagerly. "What sort of paper did you put on her room, did you say?"

"Miss Rosalie's got two rooms, now she's home for good," the young man told her, with a deep sigh. "I can show you samples of the papers if you'll just hold the lines while I get 'em; they're under the seat."

Miss Cynthia grasped the reins so firmly that her little hands trembled. She sat up very straight and a pink spot burned in each sallow cheek. Mr. Blossom did not appear to notice her agitation. He got down

off the seat, thrust one long, exploring arm beneath it and presently produced a bundle of small rolls of wall-paper, which he proceeded to spread out on his knee for Miss Cynthia's inspection.

"There, this one with a kind of a cream-white ground and little wreaths of roses running all over it is on her bedroom. I put white enamel paint on the woodwork, and she's got her grandmother's old mahogany furniture in there, and——"

The young man stopped short and looked at his companion curiously. Her blue eyes were fixed earnestly on the bobbing head of the brown horse; her lips were screwed up into a small pink knot, not unlike one of the pale rosebuds on the white wall-paper.

"Aren't you going to look at these papers, ma'am, now I've got 'em out?" he asked in a disappointed voice.

"I don't see how I can and drive this horse," replied Miss Cynthia, in a tone of poignant distress. "Seems to me the harder I pull on the lines the faster he goes. Look—he's—running away!"

Mr. Blossom reached over and possessed himself of the reins, which he proceeded to hold negligently in his

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left hand, while he diltated at length on the beauty of the wall-papers and the elegance of the apartments in the Scott house. "If I could only get a few more jobs like that one maybe I could get somewhere in the world," he concluded, his frank face clouding like the inconstant April sky. "I've always wanted to study designing and inside decorating on a big scale. I could do it, I know I could, if I only had a chance. But I suppose I'll spend the balance of my days painting the village folks' picket fences, and giving the farmers' barns an occasional coat of red paint, when they ain't too darned stingy to give me the job."

"I don't think," said Miss Cynthia, with the air of a person who consciously exerts an influence, "that you ought to say—— Well, I don't like to speak the word myself, because it *means* real bad swearing. I said it once when I was a little girl, and my mother snipped my tongue with a pair of sharp scissors. Of course she didn't really cut a piece off; but it made a sore place, and I always remember it when I hear that word."

"Jiminy; I should think you would!" agreed

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George Blossom, with a surprised whistle. "It seems to go mighty well with words like stingy and mean, though," he added. "I'd kind of hate to give it up."

Miss Cynthia fixed her blue eyes upon the young man with an inquiring gaze. "Did you ever hear anyone say that I was stingy?" she asked distinctly.

Mr. Blossom blushed a beautiful, surprised-looking red; even his ears burned scarlet under the light brown curls of his hair. "I—I didn't mean——" he began with evident distress. "I'm sure I——"

Miss Cynthia sighed. She was not a very astute little person, but she arrived at a rapid and correct conclusion for once. "I see that you have," she said regretfully. "Well, do you know, I never thought very much about it—about being stingy, I mean, till—till yesterday. Yesterday I heard something—something very important to *me*. It—it somehow changed—everything. I think I've been very foolish to be so—*so saving*. I didn't really need to be economical, you know. And I've decided to give nearly everything in my house away. I shall not need it myself, and I'm sure I shall enjoy giving it away. It—it will be different."

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Mr. Blossom was so astonished that he could hardly believe what his scarlet ears were telling him. The Breyfogle family were, in the estimation of their townspeople, an unalterable proposition. One could depend upon their stinginess quite as implicitly as on other folks' generosity. To be depended upon in any capacity is in itself praiseworthy; and nobody likes to have the fixed stars of his firmament turned incontinently into frisking comets. Mr. Blossom, therefore, upon hearing these surprising sentiments from the lips of Miss Cynthia Day, merely gave vent to a conservative whistle. He was one of those fortunate persons, usually of the sterner sex, who are able to express a large number of varied emotions in this entirely safe and non-committal manner.

"I can't think just how to begin," pursued Miss Cynthia earnestly. "I don't know who to give the things to, in the first place."

The sagacious Mr. Blossom saw his opportunity and seized it with business-like promptness. "I think, ma'am," he said very respectfully, "that one of the best ways to give things away—that is, if you have too much of anything, money, for example—is to give

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work to the people that need work, and pay them well for it. Some folks Jew you down so't you can't make any sort of a profit. 'Live and let live' is a good enough motto for me."

"'Live and let live,'" repeated Miss Cynthia thoughtfully. "What do you think that means?"

"Why, it's plain enough," said Mr. Blossom strongly. "*You're* living all right, ain't you? Got enough of everything and something to spare, if you've a mind to; but you've got to 'let' other folks live; and that means, I take it, that you ought to *help* 'em to live. If there's anything you want done that you can't do for yourself, hire somebody that can do it, and pay 'em for doing it—good, fair money, so they can live, too. If everybody did that right along I guess there wouldn't be so much talk about labour unions and strikes and all that sort of thing."

Miss Cynthia smiled vaguely. "I guess so, too," she said pleasantly. Then she sighed. "I wish it was true," she murmured.

"Wish what was true?"

"About *living*—if you let other folks live."

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“Course it’s true; who said it wasn’t?”

“Sometimes people die, you know, when—when they aren’t very old, and when they don’t want to die, either. How do you explain that?”

Mr. Blossom appeared slightly staggered by this metaphysical problem. “I can’t explain everything that happens, of course,” he said candidly. “But,” he added firmly, “I know that ‘Live and let live’ ’ll stand, as a general rule. I guess some folks could quote Scripture to back it up, too. I can’t remember Bible verses for shucks, but there’s something or other about getting the same sort of crops out of the ground that you put in. And that stands to reason and experience, too, doesn’t it? If you put in potatoes you don’t expect to dig turnips. You could turn the saying ’round, if you wanted to, and it would sound just as well—maybe better. Let live an’ live.”

Mr. Blossom looked modestly pleased with himself as he finished this pointed exposition. “Miss Rosalie’s a great hand for arguing about ’most everything,” he added irrelevantly. “Off an’ on, we’ve had some regular debates on all sorts of subjects. She’s as bright and smart as a new whip, Miss Rosalie is; only

there ain't any sting in her as there is to the end of a good whip-lash. She's *just sweet!*"

The young man lapsed into a pleasant reverie which Miss Cynthia did not disturb. She was considering in her own peculiarly slow, bewildered, and timid way some very astonishing ideas which George Blossom's simple remarks had suggested. But if Miss Cynthia's mental processes were sadly involved and clouded, her practical inferences were simple and to the point.

"If it will help you any to paint my house, inside or out, or to paper it," she said with gentle dignity, "I shall be very happy to have it done. I shall think of what you have said. It has never occurred to me before; yet it seems very reasonable, and—yes—true. I'm afraid I haven't taken much pains to 'let people live,' and that's why——"

She stopped short with a little quiver in her voice. "And that's why,"—she finished bravely—"I'm going to do quite differently—after this."

V

THE Puffer twins were energetically swinging upon their own gate when George Blossom, with Miss Cynthia at his side, drew up before the house. "Here you are, youngsters!" he called out heartily, "and here's Miss Day. Where do you s'pose I found her?"

The twins had promptly abandoned their athletic performance upon the gate in favour of similar strenuous endeavour at the back of the wagon. They precipitated themselves upon the person of the young man with every token of enthusiastic regard. "Did you bring us any apples?" they demanded.

"I shouldn't wonder," admitted Mr. Blossom joyously. "Just look in my basket there; and findings is keepings."

"We didn't see you anywhere," Edwina said, addressing Miss Cynthia, while Harriet explored the wagon like a particularly active squirrel. "But we found your basket and brought it home. We saved two

slices of bread and jam for you, and one apple, and we've put a big bunch of wintergreen berries in besides."

"Thank you," said Miss Cynthia graciously. "I found this arbutus and brought it to you. Here is a big bunch for each of you."

"Where's yours?" demanded Harriet. "Didn't you keep any for yourself? We ate lots an' lots of wintergreen berries as we went along, an' we brought some home. We like to be square."

Miss Cynthia had opened her mouth to reply when she was transfixed by the sight of a stout, imposing woman, wearing a fortress-like bonnet which commanded a very high and prominent forehead. This person was advancing majestically along the sidewalk in company with a much smaller lady, who was compelled to tilt her head sideways to address her lofty companion. They had been talking earnestly together, but the conversation suddenly ceased when they simultaneously recognised Miss Cynthia in her unlooked-for position on the high seat of George Blossom's wagon. That young person blushed as he lifted his cap to the ladies. He was a modest young man, was

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George Blossom, and he realised in his imperfect masculine way that his companion had done a very singular thing in losing herself upon a muddy road three miles beyond Innisfield.

Miss Cynthia spoke first. She had immediately recognised the tall lady as Mrs. Buckthorn, the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Ladies' Aid Society, which was to have met at her house that afternoon. The small lady was the wife of the minister.

"Good-afternoon, Mrs. Buckthorn," began Miss Cynthia, with an anxiously propitiatory smile. "I am sorry I was not at home this afternoon when the committee called. I—I was away on a picnic, and I lost my way in the woods. Besides," she added, with undeniable hardihood, "I forgot all about the meeting."

Mrs. Buckthorn drew in her breath in a peculiar sibilant fashion she was accustomed to make use of when surprised or displeased. "*So—I have learned,*" she said deliberately. "Abby Whiton told us of the picnic. She did not know that you had—*forgotten* the appointment. I dare *say* you had a very excel-

lent *reason* for what you *did*. The—Lord's—*business* does not admit of—*delay* or—*negligence* on the part of his servants."

Miss Cynthia shook her head. "I wanted to go," she said simply, "and so I just forgot all about the meeting. I hope it didn't put you out very *much*."

"No, it didn't at all," the small lady spoke up quickly. "I asked the committee to come to the parsonage, and we've had the meeting. I hope you had a pleasant time," she went on, her smile touched with a faint wistfulness. "I'd like to go arbutus hunting myself—I see you have some. But there seems to be so much to do in the parish just now."

"*And*—house cleaning, Philura," put in Mrs. Buckthorn in her majestic bass. "Every one of us ladies left some—important household task—*unfinished*, in order to attend—*this meeting*. I *trust* that we shall not be found—*unfaithful* stewards of the mammon of—*unrighteousness* when the *last day* comes!"

"I'm not going to clean house," said Miss Cynthia defiantly. "I'm going to have a picnic almost every day."

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“Goody! goody!” cried the Puffer twins in subdued chorus. “Will you bring jam on bread and red apples every time?”

“As long as they last,” Miss Cynthia told them cheerfully.

There followed a prolonged silence, in the course of which George Blossom stared hard at the back of his brown horse, and the two women on the sidewalk stared at Miss Cynthia. Mrs. Buckthorn’s gaze, delivered over the rim of her spectacles, conveyed shocked incredulity, majestic displeasure, pained astonishment, and determined curiosity. The light-blue eyes of the minister’s wife were opened wide in a puzzled and surprised look, which Miss Cynthia met with a deprecatory smile.

“I guess we’d better be movin’ along, Mis’ Pettibone,” observed Mrs. Buckthorn, in the tone of a magistrate who suspends sentence. “Good-bye, Cynthia. I trust—*the Lord* will give you—a better *mind*—before you *sleep*.”

“Darned old hypocrite!” muttered George Blossom, with cheerful acrimony. “Do you want to get out here, Miss Day, or shall I drive you on to your

house? I'd like to look the place over as soon as I can."

"Thank you," said Miss Cynthia, with an absent-minded smile. Then she became conscious that the young man's honest gray eyes were fixed inquiringly upon her. "I don't know what people will say when I begin to do the things—that—that I want to do. I've always done just what somebody else told me to do; it—it's easier, I guess."

"I s'pose all the old tabbies in town 'll talk to beat the cars if you let me have that job of painting and papering," said George Blossom gloomily. "But I'd let 'em talk. I would, by gracious! 'Tain't any of their funeral, I guess. Now, is it?"

"No," said Miss Cynthia, with a curious little catch in her breath. "It certainly isn't. I think—I shall let them talk," she went on after a little pause. "That is, I can't help it if they do talk; but I shall do as I like."

Her blue eyes wore so puzzled and wistful a look that George Blossom was moved to squeeze the little hand she offered him while he shook it warmly.

"Thank you very much for bringing me home,"

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said Miss Cynthia. "I don't know what I should have done, if you hadn't come along just when you did."

"Don't you mention it, ma'am," cried George Blossom, giving the chilly little fingers another warm squeeze. "I can tell you it was a piece of rare good fortune for me. I should never have thought of such a thing as asking you for a job. I'll be around to-morrow morning with my colour-cards and sample-books. I'll guarantee to do a job that 'll please you, Miss Day. I'll make the old place look simply great. You'll see!"

Miss Cynthia smiled in pleased anticipation; she was, nevertheless, depressed to the point of feeling utterly meek and despondent when she had entered her own door and closed it behind her. Abby Whiton hastened to describe the visit of the committee with an amplitude of graphic detail which left room for neither question nor comment.

"I cert'nly thought I should die when I seen 'em all a-standin' there," she asseverated; "Mis' Buckthorn an' the minister's wife—though she ain't much, as all of us knows—an' Electa Pratt, with the feathers

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stickin' up straight in her bunnit—she's always wore 'em sence Philura Rice caught the parson with hern. 'No!' I says, 'she ain't in; she's gone on a *picnic*.' My land! I could 'a' knocked 'em down with a feather they looked s' thunder-struck. 'To a *picnic*?' says Mis' Buckthorn. 'Yes,' I says, '*with the Puffer twins!*' I *thought* I should *die!*'"

"Suppose you should?"

"Should what?"

"Should die. Suppose you knew you were going to die—you're always talking about it. What would you do?"

"Fer goodness sake, what an idee! I cert'nly ain't a-goin' t' die tell m' time comes. Well, I guess I'd git my kitchen cleaned up good fer one thing. Then, I'd plan out my fun'ral, an' order my tombstone. Ma, she picked out all her fun'ral hymns, I remember; an' pa, he s'lected a tex' fer his fun'ral sermon. He tol' us everythin' we was to put on him down to his socks. He wanted all his best things. Like es not he was 'fraid we'd save 'em up fer Dave an' Will; an' mebbe we would 'uv, too, if pa hadn't been cute enough to think it all out beforehand. Sickness is

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sent, I s'pose, so 'at we c'n prepare for what's before us. I hope t' the land I ain't called sudden!"

"You may broil a chop for my tea," said Miss Cynthia unexpectedly. "I want it brown and hot. I didn't have any dinner, you know. I want some toast, too."

"Yer supper's been ready an' waitin' fer half an hour," Abby Whiton replied, moving her angular elbows in a way which signified a determined difference of opinion. "The's dried beef an' pickles an' cake an' tea. I'm sure that's enough fer——"

Miss Cynthia walked into the kitchen. "Give me the toasting-fork," she said tranquilly. "I think I should like to get my own supper."

Abby Whiton planted her hands on her hips, her elbows vibrating rapidly. "Git yer own supper!" she exclaimed. "Well, I want-ta-know!"

"Bring me the chop, Abby, and some bread," ordered Miss Cynthia, opening the drafts of the stove. "I shall get thoroughly warm while I am doing it."

"Now, look-a-here, Miss Cynthy, I've lived in this 'ere house goin' on thirty years, an' I ain't in the habit of havin' nobody come in my kitchen an' talk up to

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me! Even yer ma never done it towards the last, an' you know very well that I ain't a-goin' to stan' it. You an' me ain't never had no words before, an' I don't see why we should begin now. Seems to me you've been actin' mighty notional an' uppity sence yiste'd'y. I've been thinkin' 'bout it all day b' spells. I remember when you was little, you us't to git fractious once in a while, but your ma or yer Gran'ma Breyfogle always took it out of ye mighty quick. As yer ma us't to say: 'Dis'pline mus' be maintained,' she says. I never looked fer any trouble in this 'ere kitchen; an' I ain't a-goin' to have none, neither!"

Miss Cynthia listened attentively to this manifesto, a worried but entirely stubborn expression gathering about her small mouth. Abby Whiton was irresistibly reminded of the long-defunct Grandfather Breyfogle, whose imperial dictum nobody had ever been able to successfully contravene. "Fer the lan's sake!" she muttered to herself, "s'pose she sh'd take a turn after all these years!"

When Miss Cynthia spoke it was in the Breyfogle voice, and the Breyfogle revolutionary spirit looked

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out of her blue eyes. "You will have to remember in future, Abby, that this is *my* kitchen," she said distinctly, "and that it is in *my* house. I want you to bring *my* chop and two slices of *my* bread. I shall get *my* supper on *my* stove. Do you understand me?"

Abby Whiton stared. "Fer the lan's sake!" she repeated in a sibilant whisper. Then she whirled about with loud, trampling steps, more expressive of her dazed and outraged feelings than mere profanity, however lurid, cut the bread, brought the chop from the closet, and finished by slamming down the toasting-fork with an accentuated clatter which scared the dozing cat into wild-eyed consternation.

"I c'n see what's a-comin'!" she exclaimed bitterly. "After all these years, an' me a-slavin' my fingers to the bone sence you was knee high to a grasshopper an' never allowed no imperdence in this kitchen. If I live, I leave to-morrow mornin', bag *an' baggage!*" She might have added with entire suitability "and may the Lord have mercy on your soul."

Miss Cynthia proceeded to toast her chop with outward calm, her mouth still wearing the Breyfogle

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expression. Inwardly, she was quaking with long-accustomed dread. Never before in the course of her whole life had she ventured to differ in the slightest degree with the definite opinions of Abby Whiton. She had, of course, made a dignified but entirely superficial show of consulting her about various household activities and economies; but in the end she had invariably yielded to Abby Whiton's loudly-expressed decisions. Miss Cynthia's intellect refused to contemplate the consequences of her present rash behaviour.

"To-morrow mornin'," repeated Abby Whiton triumphantly. She appeared to divine the real state of her mistress's mind, and proceeded to pile Pelion upon Ossa with mistaken energy. "I guess yer poor, dead ma 'ud turn over in her grave ef she could know that I'd been fairly driv' to leave her kitchen after all these years. W'y, I've always intended to lay you out, Miss Cynthy, same as I done fer her."

Miss Cynthia turned suddenly; her eyes blazed. "I don't *want* you to stay here," she said breathlessly. "You—you shall *not* lay me out! Do you hear? You shall *not*! I am going to—*let* you live—any-

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where you want to except in this kitchen; but I'm going to do as I please in my own house as long as I live. Do you hear me?"

"I ain't deaf," snorted Abby Whiton. Then she sprang forward just in time to catch Miss Cynthia's slight figure as she swayed weakly toward the hot stove. "*Did you ever!*" she muttered to herself, as she skilfully plied the camphor and smelling-salts. "She's jest plain beat out with that redic'lous picnic—trampin' with a lot of young ones, an' joltin' in a lumber-wagon from goodness knows where. I hope I c'n see my duty; an' I shell do it!"

She helped her mistress to bed with a firmness not untouched with real tenderness which melted Miss Cynthia's soul within her. As she sat propped among her white pillows eating the chop and toast, which Abby Whiton presently set before her with a curiously indulgent air, she reviewed the circumstances of her revolt with mild regret. "I'm sorry I spoke to you just as I did, Abby," she said meekly. "I—was pretty tired, I guess, and——"

"Don't you say 'nother word, Miss Cynthia; it's *all right*. I'll see 'at you don't git so tuckered out agin,

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that's all," Abby Whiton told her, with the strong kindness of tone and manner one would use toward a particularly exasperating child, made ill by her own naughtiness.

Miss Cynthia weakly permitted the inference to pass. But the tranquil stubbornness of the Breyfogles rested upon her sleeping features in so marked a degree that Abby Whiton observed it with fresh astonishment when she came to remove the tray and the candle. "My goodness! ef she ain't gittin' to be the spit an' image of her gran'pa!" she murmured, "an' the land knows *he* was his own boss, 's well 's everybody else's, to his dyin' day!"

VI

THE fact that the rain was pouring out of a dun-coloured sky in torrents did not damp the business ardour of young Mr. Blossom. He appeared at Miss Cynthia's door clad in a streaming mackintosh, bearing a streaming umbrella and a huge package of samples done up in waterproof cloth under his arm.

"No, you can't see Miss Cynthy; she's flat on her back this mornin'," Abby Whiton informed him. "I've jes' took her breakfas' upstairs, an' she ain't a-goin' to git out o' bed to-day. I do' know but what I shell sen' fer the doctor. 'Twouldn't su'prise me a mite ef she sh'd hev a long spell o' sickness after what she done yiste'd'y. Where in under the sun did you come acrost her, George?"

"Over on Scott's cross-road, not far from the old red bridge," said Mr. Blossom. He looked exceedingly disappointed. "Do you suppose she'd be able to look over these samples?" he asked. "She told me to bring 'em this morning, sure. And of course

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the quicker I get to work on the job the quicker I can get it done."

"What job?" demanded Abby Whiton sharply. Her aspect was so aggressive, not to say intimidating, that George Blossom was involuntarily reminded of the last time that bony hand had seized upon him from behind, just as he was about to pocket a particularly luscious sweeting.

He hesitated diplomatically. "Perhaps I'd better call again," he said, with a propitiatory smile. "I don't want to take your time, Abby."

"I've got time a-plenty to hear what your errant is in this 'ere house," she told him incisively. "I've heerd you're gittin' to be a terrible smart, pushin' business man, George; but I guess we'll try an' make out 'ithout any paintin' an' paperin' *this* spring." Abby Whiton smiled grimly at the discomfited expression in the young fellow's gray eyes.

"Not this spring," she repeated decidedly. "W'y, I wouldn't go through the mess of it ef you was to pay me! I know what it is to hev paint-pails in ev'ry corner an' scraps of paper tracked all over the place. So you might's well——"

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"Oh, good-morning, Mr. Blossom," called a clear little voice from overhead. "I thought I heard you speak. Won't you walk right in; Abby will take your coat and umbrella. I'll be down at once."

"Fer the *lan's sake!*" ejaculated Abby Whiton, with a scandalised sniff. "Ef she ain't opened her window an' stuck her head right out in the rain! She'll git her death; that's what she'll git."

"Oh, I guess not," opined Mr. Blossom cheerfully. "She had on a shawl, you know." He stepped into the hall with a confident and masterful air, before which Abby Whiton involuntarily retreated kitchenward.

"Here, you c'n give me yer umbereel, an' that wet coat o' yourn," she remarked acidly. "I'll hang 'em in the wood-shed to drip a spell. I guess I'll hev to step upstairs an' see what Miss Cynthy's up to now."

As to the exact nature of the interview which took place between mistress and maid above stairs George Blossom could only guess, as he waited for what seemed an interminable length of time in the sepulchral hall. He gave vent to a low, apprehensive whistle, as an occasional excited accent reached his

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attentive ears. "Jiminy! I hope she's game," he murmured.

Two successive slams of two distant doors appeared to terminate the engagement, and presently Miss Cynthia came down the stairs. Her cheeks were flushed and her blue eyes shone with the light of hard-won victory; she looked young, almost girlish in her slim black dress. George Blossom sprang to his feet with a little exclamation of inquiring sympathy.

"No, I'm not sick," Miss Cynthia told him decidedly. "But I was so tired I overslept—for the first time in years. I'm not used to being out of doors, you know. When I awoke I found Abby had brought my breakfast upstairs. Now we'll look at the papers; for I'd like you to begin to-morrow."

"I suppose you'll make a thorough, complete job of it," observed George Blossom, glancing critically about the dingy walls of the room they entered. "There'll be some plastering to be done where the cracks are bad, and it 'll make considerable trouble, first and last. The carpets 'll have to be taken up and the furniture moved."

"I'm ready for anything," declared Miss Cynthia,

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the flush returning to her cheeks and the sparkle to her eyes. "I'll hire a woman, and a man, too, if necessary. Abby Whiton's going to leave."

"Whew!" exclaimed Mr. Blossom. Then he laughed outright. "I got her that time," he exulted boyishly.

"She's going right off—to-day," went on Miss Cynthia, with a dubious little quaver in her defiant voice. "I—I shall be quite alone in the house. I—I don't know whether——"

"I can get you a girl," said George Blossom confidently. "Mother'll be sure to know of somebody. I'll ask her. We'll have a girl here by night; see if we don't."

Then the sample-books were spread out in all the bewildering array of their dazzling possibilities. Miss Cynthia strove vainly to picture to herself a green parlour and a yellow hall in striking juxtaposition; a blue dining room coupled crudely with a pink sitting room; bedrooms festooned with mammoth pink roses climbing over impossible lattice-work; papered ceilings in vast designs of gilded scrolls and arabesques; mouldings and borders in

endless variety. She became gradually pale and depressed; and all the while the youthful and inexperienced George discoursed volubly of the style and elegance of his papers, and the astonishing changes which said papers would produce when applied to the walls of the old Breyfogle house.

"I—I don't know," murmured Miss Cynthia faintly. "I'm afraid I'd feel strange with things so—so different. These roses, now, and this scroll-work. Someway I feel all mixed up, and my head——"

Mr. Blossom stared at her in vague alarm. "Say!" he blurted out, "I oughtn't to have showed you all these books at once. Mother says they're enough to turn the brain of a saint. She couldn't pick out a paper for our parlour to save her life. I had to do it myself, and now she wishes it was different."

Miss Cynthia sighed apprehensively. She appeared to be listening furtively to the distant sounds of strong, decided footfalls which passed to and fro with dread regularity. "It's Abby," she explained, in a small, weak voice. "I suppose—she's packing her things."

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Miss Cynthia was struggling bravely with a depressing belief that the foundations of her little world were about to be terribly shaken, if not altogether removed. She realised abjectly that she had brought this unlooked for cataclysm upon herself; that it was a direct result of her own rash acts. For the moment she longed to dismiss George Blossom with his terrible sample-books. She could then humbly capitulate before Abby Whiton's entrenchments and everything would go on as before—till—till——”

“Of course I don't want Abby to stay after all she said,” she syllabled faintly. “But——”

At this crucial moment Mr. Blossom deposited his sample-books upon the floor with a decided thud. “It's clearing off,” he said abruptly; “the sun's out now. If you'll let me I'm going to bring the phaeton around and take you over to mother's to dinner; then we'll hunt a girl this afternoon. What do you say? I won't be ten minutes.”

“Oh, I don't believe I could,” faltered Miss Cynthia. “Your mother wouldn't be expecting me, and——”

“She asked me to bring you,” declared George

Blossom mendaciously. "She said she hadn't seen you for years to speak to. She was so surprised and pleased when I told her you'd given me such a splendid job. I told her about our ride yesterday, and she said she really wished she could have a good talk with you."

The last part of this statement was strictly true, and the young man's tone was so hearty and convincing, his gray eyes so kind and reassuring that Miss Cynthia, her little courage quite exhausted, looked at him gratefully. "I'll go," she said. Then her face fell. "I shall have to stay and see Abby off," she faltered. "I must settle with her, and——"

"Leave her money on the table and a note telling her to put the key under the door-mat," promptly advised the sapient George. "I guess there aren't any fond last words coming to her, if she talked to you as I expect she did."

And this hard-hearted suggestion Miss Cynthia weakly followed to the letter.

Half an hour later Abby Whiton, reconnoitring the premises from an upper window, was thunder-

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struck to behold her mistress in the full panoply of her best gown, being assisted by George Blossom into his new phaeton. This was the last drop in the overflowing cup of her indignities. "Fer the *lan's* sake!" she cried. "Ef she ain't gone silly daft over *that boy!* It's all clear to me *now*. Well, I'd a sight druther have laid her out than to see her makin' a fool o' herself."

Functions of a mortuary nature had always proved more congenial to the somewhat gloomy tastes of Miss Whiton than anything in the way of love and matrimony. She was accustomed to look down upon all "men-folks" from a Matterhorn-like peak of maiden scorn; but for "young fellers," such as George Blossom, she felt an unqualified contempt.

"W'y, he ain't hardly out o' short pants!" she told herself fiercely, as she hurried down to the lower regions for further investigations. "More'n likely she hadn't no idee I meant a word I said 'bout goin'; but she'll find she's mistook. I ain't a-goin' to be tromped on by nobody."

As a matter of fact, Miss Whiton had as yet made

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no move toward actual preparations for leaving, beyond ostentatiously emptying her wardrobe. "M' closet's got to be cleaned out, anyhow," she had reflected; "I might's well do it to-day as any other day."

She had decided further that she would allow Miss Cynthia to have the house painted on the outside. "'Tain't a-goin' to hurt me any, an' I guess the's spots along the gutters 'at needs it," she admitted. "I reelly hadn't noticed. As for the paperin', ef she's s' awful set on makin' a change I do' know as I care if the parlour an' settin' room's done."

This indulgent and amicable frame of mind was suddenly changed to wrath and bitterness of spirit by the discovery of the letter with its valuable enclosure, which Miss Cynthia had deposited in a conspicuous place upon the kitchen table.

"My wages, an' fifty dollars extry 'fer long an' faithful services'!" snorted Abby. "Well, I want-ta-know! I c'n leave the key under the door-mat, kin I? Well——!"

Her grim face paled as the inexorable nature of

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the communication forced itself upon her attention. “W’y—W’y!—She reelly wants I should go—an’ I a-livin’ here in this house sence she was a baby! I remember it ’s ’o it was yiste’d’y. I was livin’ to home when Mis’ Day come after me. ‘We’ve got a little girl three years old,’ she says: ‘but she’s a good, obedient child,’ she says. An’ she cert’nly was, poor little thing! I never did care much fer childern, but she was sech a white-faced, scared-lookin’ little mite, an’ her ma was always so up-an’-down with her, let alone her pa an’ Gran’ma an’ Gran’pa Breyfogle. All of ’em took a han’ at fetchin’ her up, off an’ on. None of ’em b’lieved in sparin’ the rod, neither. My! how she us’t’ holler some days! Then agin, she’d creep ’round like a little lamb, ’s quiet an’ good ’s could be. They kep’ her dressed jes’ so clean an’ neat, an’ she wa’n’t never ’lowed to muss her clo’es or to play out over-much. They kep’ her busy a-doin’ her stents an’ her cat’chism. She cert’nly was a good child. An’ to think of her a-breakin’ out now—after all these years!”

Abby Whiton scorned the display of sentiment

of any sort, but alone in the familiar kitchen, painful tears crowded her dry old eyes and coursed salt and bitter down her lean cheeks, as she again perused Miss Cynthia's brief and decisive communication. Could she have known it, there were other drops scarce dry among the few words of dismissal and farewell. Thirty years of life together in any relationship knits bonds that are bound to hurt when they are broken.

"Mebbe I was kind of foolish to undertake to cross her so," acknowledged poor Abby. "Come to think of it, she's reelly the boss here, an' her Gran'pa Breyfogle's ways are a-growin' on her, I guess. Course she can't help that! But it cert'nly is queer how it come on her all of a sudden. W'y, only last week she says to me, 'Abby,' she says, 'don't you think we'd better invite the minister an' his wife to tea pretty soon?' 'Land, no!' I says, 'not this spring. We've had 'em twict a'ready sence Mis' Buckthorn had 'em to her house. The' ain't no sense in bein' too lavish,' I says. 'It costs money ev'ry time we hev comp'ny,' I says. An' she give right in without a word, same as she always done.

"My! ef I ain't saved an' scrimped fer her! I'll

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bet I ain't wasted a bit of victuals the size o' my thumb nail sence her ma died. I've jest took the hull r'sponsibility right onto my shoulders, an' I hain't shirked m' duty neither. I really couldn't ha' done more fer her ef I'd 'a be'n a blood relation o' hern, an' now—— Well, I'll hev to go, that's all the' is 'bout it. But what in under the sun she'll do without me is more 'n I c'n tell. More 'n likely she'll git in some slack young girl 'at 'll throw her money out the back door faster 'an she c'n bring it in at the front. I know 'em, with their good-fer-nothin', shif'less ways! Well, I'm a-goin'; I can't help what happens to her now."

In pursuance of this resolution Miss Whiton produced a long-cherished stump of lead pencil from its chosen niche atop the kitchen clock, and painfully scrawled a few words on the back of the paper upon which the farewell words of her mistress were inscribed.

"Miss Cynthy: [she wrote] I ain't in the habit of takin' no money I don't earn. I don't want no fifty dollars extry fer doin' right. You can spend it on

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wall-paper, if you want to. But if I was you I should lay it up for a rainy day *that ain't fur off*. You won't git anybody in a hurry that will do fer you what I done. Your resp'fully, 'Abby Whiton."

This done, she sealed up the unshed balance of her tears with two or three vigorous sniffs of self-righteous approval, packed her belongings with a long-armed energy approaching fierceness, donned her best black alpaca and her old-fashioned black hat trimmed with purple asters, the gift of Grandmother Breyfogle.

The kitchen was painfully clean and silent, as she stood and looked about it for the last time. The loud-voiced clock which had ticked a faithful accompaniment to her many labours during thirty years sounded solemnly in her ears, as it had done on the days when some member of the family had lain dying above stairs.

"*Oh my!*" wailed Abby Whiton, suddenly throwing up her hands. "Seems 's 'o I couldn't stan' it nohow!"

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She whirled blindly about and went out of the door, turned the clumsy old key in its worn lock, drew it out and thrust it under the mat. Then she walked steadily down the path and out into the street, her head high, her eyes fixed straight before her.

VII

IF Miss Cynthia had cherished any unpleasant doubts as to the warmth of her reception at the hands of George Blossom's mother, these doubts were immediately put to rest at the sight of Mrs. Blossom herself, rosy, stout, and smiling, her voluminous purple calico skirts and spotless apron flying wide on the April wind as she hurried down the path to meet her guest.

“Well, now I call this reel kind and neighbourly!” she cried, enthusiastically kissing Miss Cynthia's thin cheek. “I'm kep' in so constant with the milk an' all I don't get out much, but I do enjoy to see folks. Our George, he's been tellin' me 'bout the job you've given him at your house, and I wanted to tell you how glad I am. He 's so ambitious, our George is. I don't know as I c'n make out just what he doos want to do; I sh'd think he'd be pretty well satisfied to be gettin' along as well as he is, with a good trade

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an' all. But I suspicion there's a girl at the root of the matter."

The good woman winked and nodded jovially at Miss Cynthia, who found herself in quite a pleasant flutter of anticipation. She had never been allowed to visit or to have company in her younger days, and of late years the feeble stirrings of her social ambitions had been promptly suppressed by the frugal Abby Whiton. She experienced an entirely new and delightful sensation as she found herself ensconced in Mrs. Blossom's comfortable, sunshiny sitting room. There were scarlet geraniums blooming in the clear windows, and a yellow canary singing riotously in a gilt cage. There were books and magazines, too, with gay covers, and a deep chair with cushions.

"Our George is a great hand for reading," Mrs. Blossom explained, with smiling pride. "An' he 's always gettin' me something new an' pretty. He bought me the canary and this chair for my birthday. I never see anybody like that boy for thinkin' up things to do for other folks. I guess he'll make somebody a pretty good husband, some of these days."

“Is it Rosalie Scott?” asked Miss Cynthia, with simplicity.

Mrs. Blossom laughed exuberantly.

“Has George been talkin’ to you ’bout *her*, a’ready?” she inquired. “Well, I declare, he doos beat all! I tell him he ought n’t to wear his heart on his sleeve the way he doos, but he’s just like me; I never could keep in ’bout anything I reelly cared about. Rosalie ’s a lovely girl.—My! I guess she *is*! If our George can get *her*—But I don’t know, she ’s be’n away to school, an’ I guess her pa an’ ma think our George ain’t up to her level. *We* think he’s up to most anybody’s level, as far as smartness an’ goodness goes. Of course, we ain’t rich, an’ we ain’t be’n able to do for George the way we’d like to, but *we* think there ain’t a nicer boy anywhere than our George.” Her motherly eyes demanded instant corroboration from Miss Cynthia.

“He was certainly very kind to me yesterday,” Miss Cynthia said sincerely. “I’m glad I met him up there on the hill. Perhaps I shouldn’t have thought of——”

“No, I don’t s’pose you would, reelly,” chimed in

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Mrs. Blossom apologetically. "Our George is so full of ideas, an' he's real pushin', too, in his business. It 'll be quite a tear-up at your house to do all you're talking of. An' Abby Whiton 's gone! I sh'd think you'd reelly dread to make a change. She must have been pretty near like one of the family, after all these years."

"Yes," said Miss Cynthia, with a troubled little smile, "that was just it. She was so much like one of the family that she—I—I thought I should like to have things—different—for a year, maybe."

"I sh'd think you would enjoy a change on some accounts, most everybody doos," agreed Mrs. Blossom cautiously. She looked hard at her visitor, her honest brown eyes filled with a frank surprise and curiosity. "I used to know your mother some, when we were both girls," she went on with a reminiscent smile. "She always lived at home after she was married, and you were her only child. Her folks couldn't bear to let her out of their sight, I remember, an' they was just the same with you, I've heard tell."

"I always stayed at home a good deal," admitted

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Miss Cynthia, with an air of proud reserve. "There didn't seem to be any call to go out much. Then, of course, there was sickness, so——"

"Of course, of course," sighed Mrs. Blossom; "most of us is kep' in by one thing or another. But now the' ain't anything to hender you, I sh'd say. 'An' I guess you'll begin to have a good time, once you get your house all fixed up." She nodded and smiled encouragingly. "You 've got such nice big rooms at your house you c'n entertain company reel nice, an' have folks to stay with you, too. It ain't as if you was old. Why you can't be more'n——"

Miss Cynthia blushed resentfully, then she slowly paled. "I'm thirty-three," she said in a low, determined voice, "I don't mean to wait to begin my good times. I've waited too long, now."

"Well, I must say you 're reel sensible," observed Mrs. Blossom wonderingly. "Most of us keeps a-jog-trottin' right along, without seein' anything ahead of us except our work. I know I do."

"What do you think is the best way to give things away?" asked Miss Cynthia suddenly. "My house is so full of all sorts of furniture and clothes and

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fancy-work and—and *things*, I want to give them away.”

Her hostess looked hopelessly mystified. “Our George was saying——” she began. Then she laughed comfortably. “Well, I declare, if that ain’t a new idee! Most of us is busy the endurin’ while tryin’ to hold on to our old things. But perhaps on account of the paintin’ an’ paperin’ you was thinkin’ of refurnishin’. You might have an auction; or——” The good woman’s face lighted with the fire of a new idea. “Did you ever hear of a *rummage sale*? I was readin’ ’bout one in the Ladies’ Household Treasury the other day.”

Miss Cynthia shook her head. “I don’t want to sell my things,” she said, “I want to give them away. It will be different.”

“I sh’d say so!” exclaimed Mrs. Blossom. ‘After a tense silence she laughed again, in the rich, mellow way which seemed to be a habit of hers. “You might have a *rummage give-away*,” she suggested. “Just set out everything you don’t want and let folks come and take their pick. You’d get rid of your things all right.”

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"I don't see why that wouldn't be a good idea," Miss Cynthia said thoughtfully. "But how would people know I was going to—to—rummage?"

"Why, I s'pose it might be give out in church, it's a kind of charity, seems to me, though I don't know as I ever heard of such a thing. It 'ud get around fast enough, anyway, if you was to speak of it. The' 's plenty of folks 'at 'ud be glad to see what you set out, even if you was n't goin' to give 'em a stick of it. Why don't you ask the minister?"

"I don't see," Miss Cynthia observed mildly, "why I should ask the minister. It has n't anything to do with charity or—or religion. I'm tired of my things, and I'm tired of being stingy, that 's all."

Mrs. Blossom stared helplessly at her guest. "The' 's all sorts of tired feelin's comes onto folks in the spring," she said at last, "but I guess this is the first time I ever heard tell of that special kind. But here comes George. I'll just step out into the kitchen and look after the dinner while you an' him visit a spell. Don't you let him show you a single one of those wall-papers of hisn, or you won't be able to eat a bite."

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Miss Cynthia did not in the least know why, but she felt better and brighter and younger and more loving than she had felt in years, when she arose from Mrs. Blossom's cheerful dinner-table.

"You want to be sure an' get a girl 'at knows how to cook reel well," said that good woman beamingly, as she observed the pleasant glow in her guest's wan face.

She cherished a private little gospel of her own, did Mrs. Blossom, and it had a vast deal in it about good cooking. She was vaguely aware that man does not live by bread alone; but a certain fine, motherly instinct assured her that the quality of the bread terrestrial determines to an astonishing degree one's appetite for the bread celestial. It probably would never have occurred to Mrs. Blossom that Cynthia Day was sick and weak and old before her time, and gloomy and depressed and stingy and timid and inhospitable, just because of the quality of the meals she had hitherto partaken of in the musty seclusion of the Breyfogle dining room. But she held certain shrewd, well-founded suspicions regarding the methods of Abby Whiton.

"Somebody that can cook reel good, wholesome, relishin' victuals," she repeated, with her rich, gurgling laugh. "Now, there 's Nellie Ryan. I taught her to cook, myself—times when I had to get in help from outside. She 's slack about her kitchen, I'll admit, an' I never could teach her to save the pieces; but she c'n turn out as tasty a meal as you'd want to set down to; an' she's willin' as willin' c'n be. She's pretty, too; an' for my part, I like to see a rosy, good-natured face in my kitchen."

"I shan't mind if she's slack," Miss Cynthia said eagerly. "I think I'd like it. I've never seen anybody slack, or—or pretty in our kitchen."

Nellie Ryan was leaning upon the picket gate talking with a smart-looking young workman in overalls when George Blossom reined in his big brown horse before her mother's cottage. She nodded shyly, her pretty Irish face dimpling and flushing coquettishly. The young fellow in overalls wheeled about with a sheepish grin. "Hello, George!" he growled, "that you?"

"Hello, Bill," responded Mr. Blossom amiably.

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"I've brought Miss Day to see Nellie on a little business."

Thus introduced, Miss Cynthia somewhat breathlessly unfolded her errand. "I do hope you'll come," she finished, "I'm all alone, and I—I don't know what to do."

The girl's eyes followed her late visitor as he tramped away down the street. "I'm afraid I couldn't stay with you very long," she said, blushing. "I could come for the summer, perhaps."

"If you'll stay with me for a year," said Miss Cynthia, looking wistfully down into the pretty, rosy face, "I'll give you four dollars a week. I want somebody who will stay for—a year."

The girl opened her blue eyes very wide; the sum mentioned was an unheard of sum to pay for housework in the village of Innisfield. "I should like to earn all that money, ma'am," she said, showing her white teeth in a pleased smile; "an' I'll do it if—if——" She cast a shy, laughing glance at George Blossom. "I was thinkin' of being married in the fall, ma'am, and I should hate to—to ask him to wait; but maybe——"

“Don’t do it,” Miss Cynthia said quickly. “Don’t ask him to wait. No—no, you mustn’t wait! Come and stay with me for the summer. Perhaps it won’t be a—a year. Perhaps——” She controlled herself with a visible effort. “I shall pay you just the same for the time you do stay.”

And so it came to pass that Nellie Ryan reigned in Abby Whiton’s stead, and things were “different” in the Breyfogle kitchen, and also in the Breyfogle dining room. George Blossom began to scrape and paint the outside of the Breyfogle house, and the young man known as Bill assisted him in the process. Of a noon Bill ate his lunch with Nellie at the kitchen table Abby Whiton had scoured to a stern and uncompromising whiteness.

Miss Cynthia could hear their careless young laughter as she ate her own solitary dinner. This meal was now of such a surprisingly satisfying and abundant nature that she was almost afraid to meet the crayoned eyes of the late Mrs. Day, who still presided in cold black and white from above the mantelpiece. She had already entertained the minister and his wife

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at tea, and George Blossom and his mother at dinner, and the Puffer twins had formed the cheerful habit of dropping in to breakfast whenever the appetite for jam and toast overcame them, which was often.

All this had taken place, and the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

On the seventh day, Miss Cynthia went to church.

VIII

CYNTHIA DAY had been accustomed to attend the regular morning service of the Innisfield Presbyterian church since the days when, after sitting for what seemed a dreary age with her young eyes hopelessly below the horizon of the family pew and her small feet sticking out straight in front, she had been mercifully permitted to lose consciousness upon her mother's angular knees.

The Breyfogle pew, with its array of fly-blown palm-leaf fans, its musty hymnals and its curious old-fashioned foot-stools, prone to topple over thunderously in the midst of "the long prayer," was as much of a family heritage as the old house on Maple Street, or the family plot in the bleak burying-ground. Miss Cynthia had always cherished a belief that the title to a mansion in the skies was inalienably associated with a rigidly regular attendance upon what she had been taught to call "divine service." As to just what constituted the service, or in

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what particular part of it inhered divinity, Miss Cynthia had never ventured to inquire.

On this particular Sunday morning, while the thin-voiced bell still clanged its insistent summons to worship, Miss Cynthia slipped into her accustomed corner, in her own peculiarly modest and shadowy way. She had never attracted the attention of curious eyes, being as much a part of the familiar Sabbath topography of the place as the thick, black Bible on the preacher's desk, or the shining, bald head of Deacon Scrimger in the fourth pew from the chancel.

It was a time-honoured custom among the adult members of the congregation to recognise the sanctity of the place and occasion by briefly bowing the head upon the further rim of one's pew. This pious act (originating in the early Puritan days) combined an uncompromising denial of the Papish practice of kneeling in church with an ingeniously difficult attitude of body calculated to meet the stern demands of the New England conscience. For a person of small stature, the exercise became a painfully strenuous one. But no Breyfogle had ever been known to omit it. Miss Cynthia, therefore, leaned aspiringly for-

ward, the toes of her little shoes scarce touching the floor, and grasping the cold, slippery railing of the pew with one determined hand, with the other applied an equally cold and slippery handkerchief to her eyes in the prescribed manner.

This devotional period was quite frankly employed by the younger and more thoughtless members of the congregation as an excellent opportunity for inspecting the hats and bonnets on the bowed heads of the worshippers. Well over, certain whispered observations on current topics of communal interest might be circumspectly passed between contiguous pews.

On the present occasion the majestic Mrs. Buckthorn was seen to exchange discreet confidences with Miss Electa Pratt in the choir seats, and that lady's prominent plumes vibrated with poignant emotion as she whispered a few words in the ear of the lady next her. Other heads in various parts of the house bowed like weighted grain under a passing breeze, while a fire of inquisitive eyes was presently centred upon the crown of Miss Cynthia's black bonnet, which still remained bowed upon the outer rim of the Breyfogle

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pew. Strange and surprising rumours concerning the singular doings of Miss Cynthia had been circulated from mouth to mouth during the past week, and the unusual worshipfulness of her demeanour was felt to be strongly corroborative evidence.

But Miss Cynthia was quietly crying in the black-bordered handkerchief beneath the shelter of her drooping black veil. The revolution in her small, bleak world had been so complete and overwhelming that the sight of the unchanged Breyfogle pew, and even the ancient and musty smell of the hymn books,—so directly associated with religion of the Breyfogle Presbyterian variety as to subtly represent the odour of sanctity in Miss Cynthia's nostrils—had proved painfully agitating.

It was almost as though she had come suddenly face to face with her stern-visaged Grandfather Breyfogle, in the midst of some escapade of acknowledged impropriety. For the moment she was quite drowned in distressing doubts and fears. She wished weakly that all was over, and that she was safely hidden from human view beneath the sheltering sod of the family plot. She trembled to think of her bold plans for the

coming week. They now appeared to her as brazen and improper to the verge of sinfulness. And all these quiverings and cryings of a newly-awakened soul arose in a very sincere, if wordless, little prayer to the God of her fathers.

The effort to swallow her unreasoning tears, and to furtively dab away the evidences of them with her thinly-starched pocket-handkerchief occupied Miss Cynthia through the preliminary prayers and hymns until the pleasantly secular reading of the notices was announced.

This tiny oasis of human interest, set midway between a sermon of unknown length and dulness and the various devotional exercises which immediately preceded it, always received the closest attention of the congregation; it being, in fact, a sort of social programme for the entire community. It was then that Miss Cynthia raised her head and fixed her reddened eyes upon the minister with what strongly resembled a look of actual defiance.

"My gracious!" whispered the observant Miss Pratt. "Do look at her! She's been cryin', an' I don't wonder!"

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The evening service, conducted by the Y. P. S. C. E.; the regular weekly church prayer meeting; the second grand Combination Entertainment in the lecture course of the Y. M. C. A.; the annual offering for the cause of foreign missions, and the cake sale and social of the W. C. T. U. having been duly announced and commented upon, the Rev. Mr. Pettibone lifted the last thin slip of paper from the sacred desk and assumed an attitude which his congregation recognised as prefatory to remarks of a peculiarly pastoral nature.

“I hold in my hand,” said the Rev. Mr. Pettibone, with impressive oratorical emphasis, “one of the most remarkable notices which has ever been laid upon this pulpit. Perhaps I should add that I have not met, in my experience as a pastor, with a similar case. And yet, this communication is a very direct and practical exposition of Biblical truth. We are told in the Scriptures that the man who possesses two cloaks should straightway give one of them to the man who has none. How many of us have heeded this direct command of the Master’s? How many of the female members of this congregation having two

bonnets, or two dresses, or two shawls, or two——” Mr. Pettibone paused, as he met the anxious eyes of his wife in one of the front pews.

“—Or two—er—of any necessary article of clothing,” he concluded somewhat lamely, “have freely offered this—er—extra garment to the woman who had none? I venture to say that very few of us have even contemplated such an action. But here is one of our own number who wishes to freely give—to *give*, mark you—not only clothing, but a number of other useful articles to those in need. I will now read the notice as it was handed to me:

“ ‘Miss Cynthia Day would like to give away a number of articles, comprising clothing, furniture, carpets and household goods of all descriptions, at her residence on Maple Street, beginning at ten o’clock on Thursday morning of this week. Will the members of the congregation kindly spread this notice among those who are in need of such articles? ’ ”

The audible gasp of consternation and astonishment which followed was promptly covered by the reading of a hymn. When the congregation stood up to

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sing, Miss Cynthia stood up, slim and straight in the Breyfogle pew. Her small face wore a strangely aloof and impersonal expression which was variously construed as pride, vain-glory, hypocrisy, and even a failing mind by the charitable matrons of her acquaintance.

It is to be feared that the Reverend Silas Pettibone's very excellent discourse did not receive the attention which it merited. The weak and superficial rendering of the closing hymn, and the final benediction, utilised for the most part by the congregation as a period of preparation for a hasty exodus into the aisles, prefaced a determined assault upon the Breyfogle pew. Miss Cynthia, pale and tremulous, but strongly resembling her intrepid ancestor, waited the attack.

"Well, well, well, Cynthy!" began Deacon Scrimger, clicking his artificial teeth in an unpleasant smile, "you give us quite a leetle s'prise this mornin'—quite a s'prise! What's your idee in givin' away your worldly goods in this 'ere——"

"Let *me* speak to her," commanded Mrs. Buckthorn, elbowing the gathering crowd with the determined

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authority of an ambulance surgeon hastily summoned to the scene of a fatal accident.

“*What* do you *mean* by this *unheard* of action, my *dear* child?” she inquired. “Have you *any* conception of the dangerous ideas you are settin’ afloat in this ’ere community? Suppose each an’ every one of us should undertake to do as you are doing, we should shortly have the tramps *an’* beggars from the whole county at our doors. I *pity* you, Cynthia, from the *bottom* of my heart; I do, indeed! You should have consulted *me* before——”

“You’d better b’lieve I’m comin’ a-Thursday, bright an’ early, too!” twittered Miss Electa Pratt, with a girlish giggle. “I think it’s just *too* exciting an’ lovely for anything! I wouldn’t miss it for worlds! I may come, mayn’t I?”

“I hope,” said Miss Cynthia stiffly, “that you will all come and help me, so that the things will go to the right people.”

“Who are the right people?” demanded an incisive voice from the rear. A suppressed laugh arose at this question.

Miss Cynthia shook her head. “I don’t know,” she

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said. "But I expect they'll come. I have so many things, you know; and—and—I've never given any of them away. I shall give them away now, even if the wrong people take them."

Mrs. Pettibone pressed close to the little woman's side—they were both little women. "I think it's just beautiful," she whispered encouragingly. "It—it's like the Encircling Good, you know. That's everywhere, and we can each take from it just what we want most."

"But I'm not doing it to—to be good, or religious," faltered Miss Cynthia. "It's only because I—I want to——"

Mrs. Pettibone squeezed Miss Cynthia's cold little fingers. "I shall come and help," she said, "so will Mr. Pettibone."

"I shall be *there*," intoned Mrs. Buckthorn majestically. "I consider it my pers'nal dooty. I have never been known to blench at the call of dooty, *whatever* the pers'nal sacrifice to self."

"I'll try to git eround," quavered Deacon Scrimger. "I've got a leetle idee of my own 'at I'll let ye know when the time comes."

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There seemed to be no doubt whatever of the success of the enterprise considered from a merely social standpoint. If Miss Cynthia had desired to put an end to her long loneliness, she could not have devised a better scheme. In the days that followed pretty Nellie Ryan was kept busy from morning till night answering the door-bell, which was finally jerked bodily from its ancient socket by an eager young person from a neighbouring village who had come to inquire whether any bicycles were to be given away on Thursday.

“What *I* want to know is, just *what* do you intend givin’ away?” asked Mrs. Buckthorn, whose sense of duty had led her to call upon Miss Cynthia early on Monday morning.

“Why, nearly everything,” replied Miss Cynthia calmly. “I am going to have these rooms papered and painted, and it will be ever so much easier to give the things away than to move them about from place to place.”

“Then you mean to buy everything new,” observed Mrs. Buckthorn, transfixing Miss Cynthia with her spectacled gaze.

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Miss Cynthia bore up bravely under the attack. "I expect to use some old furniture that has been stored in the attic for years," she replied. "I am tired of seeing these things," she added with unexpected bitterness.

"Do you mean to tell *me*, Cynthia Day, that you are goin' to *give* to any Tom, Dick, or Harry that 'll carry 'em away *this furniture* an' *these carpets* that your sainted ma took care of as if they was made of gold?"

"Yes," said Miss Cynthia directly. She glanced about the densely furnished rooms with an odd expression which did not escape the vigilant eyes of the matron.

"Not this *stuffed sofa*?" demanded Mrs. Buckthorn, with rising indignation.

"Yes."

"An' these 'ere black walnut chairs with gilt trimmings?"

"Yes."

"And both of those marble-topped tables?"

Miss Cynthia inclined her head stiffly.

"An' this han'some body-brussels carpet, with not

a *hole* in it, an' hardly faded a *mite*, an' that *el'gant* whatnot with all those china ornaments?"

Miss Cynthia straightened herself in her chair, with a determined tightening of her small mouth. "If I—if I was to die," she said in a low voice, "these things would have to be sold at auction. I have no—no relatives, who would care for them. If I wish to give them away, why should anyone—why should I not do it?"

Mrs. Buckthorn carefully inspected the small figure of her hostess, as she sat on one of the stuffed chairs in the full light of the east window. "I haven't seen you look as *well* as you do now for *years*, Cynthia," she said meditatively. "Seems to *me* you've been fleshin' up quite a little this spring, an' I *never* saw you show such a *colour* since you was a girl. But I do d'clare I believe your *mind* is affected. Do you have headaches much?"

Miss Cynthia smiled faintly. "I haven't had the headache since I began to leave my windows open at night," she said.

"You don't mean to *tell* me that you *sleep* with your *windows* open!" exclaimed Mrs. Buckthorn

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incredulously. "Why, ain't you afraid of the *night air*—an' burglars? It doosn't seem quite—*nice*—for a female person to admit the *night air* into her bedroom. It's *sure* to give you colds an' maybe consumption. Why, I remember a niece of mine 'at was *possessed* to throw up her windows at night, an' many an' many a time I've shut 'em down after she'd gone to sleep. I felt as 'o it was my pers'nal dooty. An' do you *know* that girl died of consumption before she was twenty! It was a warnin' to *me*! Then, if a burglar——"

"I used to think just that way," explained Miss Cynthia, "but one night I felt so—so smothered, I couldn't seem to get my breath, so I opened the windows, and, really, I was surprised, I did sleep better. I felt as though I didn't care if I did take cold," she added under her breath.

Mrs. Buckthorn arose with a deep, discouraged sigh and began a majestic tour of the premises. "Not *this*—I *hope*, Cynthia," she said, indicating a ponderous gilt-embossed Bible.

"Yes, I think so; I never read in it."

"*Never read* in it!"

"I've a smaller one upstairs," amended Miss Cynthia hastily.

"What about *this*?" 'This' was a large and elaborate hair-wreath in a deep glass case. "If I remember rightly, your dear departed mother made this *beautiful* wreath."

"Yes, she did," admitted Miss Cynthia, staring at the object with a queer look in her blue eyes. "I helped, too. I stayed in the house all the afternoons of a whole summer, when I was seventeen, straightening out combings. All the family hair is in it, and they're all dead but me."

"What a *pr-recious* family memorial!" exclaimed Mrs. Buckthorn feelingly. "Surely you're not thinking of parting with *that*!"

"I'm not going to give it away," said Miss Cynthia. She did not see fit to inform her visitor that she had already laid the foundations of a sort of funeral pyre in the back yard which she believed would materially assist her in solving a number of problems of a similar nature.

"I never saw such *el'gant* fine tattin' and crocheted work as your dear relatives used to do when they was

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sojournin' in this vale of tears," Mrs. Buckthorn went on. "Now, this here han'some set of tidies an' chair-covers, what was you going to do with these?"

Miss Cynthia's blue eyes sparkled with a singular light.

"I made those things," she said abruptly. "I crocheted them out of number ninety spool cotton with a fine steel hook. I worked a year on them, and all the while I——" She stopped short, and eyed her visitor, as she fingered the hated objects. "Would you—would you care to accept them?" she asked.

"My! I don't see how you c'n *bear* to part with 'em!" murmured Mrs. Buckthorn. "I shouldn't like to *rob*——"

"I *want* to part with them," interrupted Miss Cynthia breathlessly. "They always make me think of—— Do take them, Mrs. Buckthorn; they won't make you think of anything."

"My *dear* child, they'll make me think of *you*! Thank you, *so much*!"

Miss Cynthia meekly endured the voluminous embrace and moist, matronly kiss which was the direct outcome of this transaction. There were other

objects within view at sight of which Mrs. Buckthorn's neighbourly sympathies and mournful memories of past days overflowed in a flood of picturesque reminiscences.

"It *doos* bring it all back to me *so!*" she sighed. "It was right *here*, I remember, on this nice black hair rug, that the undertaker—it was Mr. Fish, in those days; poor man, he's dead an' gone, too!—Well, he set your sainted gran'father's coffin right on this here rug, with a wreath on top of it made out of purple an' white everlastin's that me an' Mr. Buckthorn sent in. We always thought *so* much of *all* your folks. I don't suppose you ever *realised* just what they was to *us*."

"No, I didn't," Miss Cynthia admitted. "I never supposed the neighbours cared very much about any of us. I don't see why they should."

Mrs. Buckthorn gave vent to a long and windy sigh. She squeezed Miss Cynthia's little hand. "The sacrest feelin's of the human heart ain't *always* apparent," she said, "but the's *occasions*, such as deaths an' fun'rals, that brings 'em to the *surface*. Of course, you'll keep this han'some hair rug. I

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d'clare, I don't b'lieve the moths has ever been in it. Seems to me I c'n smell camphire on it now."

Miss Cynthia was looking very pale. "I wish you'd take it away," she said in a low voice.

She drew a deep breath of the wild April air as she stood on the doorstep watching the departing form of Mrs. Buckthorn. That good lady had cordially offered to "stay all day an' help get ready for Thursday." But Miss Cynthia had excused herself on the ground of a previous and pressing engagement.

"I'm afraid I'm getting real sly," she told herself, with a guilty little laugh. "It was only the bonfire. The twins are coming to help; but I couldn't have her. I'm glad she's taken away all those things. I hope I'll never see them again!"

IX

THE idea of the bonfire originated in Harriet Puffer's fertile brain. "That's an awfully funny kind of a wreath," she remarked, when curiously examining the mortuary memorial composed of the indestructible remains of many dead and gone Breyfogles and Days. "I sh'd think you'd rather have one made out of real flowers."

"I should," sighed Miss Cynthia. "I wish I knew what to do with this one. I can't give it away, and I'm not going to put anything up in the attic any more."

"It's lots of fun to burn things up," observed Harriet thoughtfully. "We could make a lovely doll's cupboard out the wood an' glass part—see, it's got a regular little door. An' the hair part would sizzle right up, if you sh'd put it on a bonfire."

"So it would," agreed Miss Cynthia. Her mind reverted to the vast collection of family documents stored away in divers ancient receptacles above stairs,

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which it had been her mother's unvarying custom to unpack, to untie, to dust, to retie and pack again with dire thoroughness, as the seasons changed. She herself had already performed this rite on nine successive occasions. "These family papers harbour dust and dirt, *if* neglected," had been Grandmother Breyfogle's dictum. "But they should be preserved out of respect to the departed."

"I shall burn them all," said Miss Cynthia firmly. "There'll be nobody to take care of them—next spring."

The Puffer twins had already regaled themselves upon certain choice selections from a herd of gingerbread animals constructed by the ingenious Nellie. They now joyously accompanied Miss Cynthia to the attic, entirely ready to convey any designated object to the back yard; the one idea in their youthful minds being to build as large and inflammable a pile as possible. It did not strike them as at all singular that the first article to be consigned to the place of sacrifice was a small, three-legged stool.

"I used to sit on that stool to do my stents," said Miss Cynthia, regarding it soberly.

"What are stents?" inquired Harriet.

"Something you have to do perfectly in a certain time or get punished," Miss Cynthia told her. "I had to sew, and knit, and cut patches, and crochet, and learn hymns and Bible verses on that stool. Nearly every day I was whipped for failing in one of my stents."

The twins regarded the three-legged stool with a fearful interest. "If you'd been twins——" suggested Edwina hopefully.

"If I had been twins," said Miss Cynthia gloomily, "there would have been two stools."

"I guess we'd rather do stunts," giggled Harriet. "Stunts are more fun, like climbing awful high trees, when you're scared of fallin', or hoppin' on one foot to the grocery store—that's an *awful* hard stunt, but we c'n do it."

The stool of dire memories was planted as the foundation of the pyre. Around it gradually arose a pyramid of old letters, cancelled checks, tax bills and bundles of red-lined documents and leather-backed account books.

A curious box containing divers sets of gold-

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mounted, artificial teeth roused the twins to excited questionings. "Are they real teeth? Whose teeth are they? Why are teeth in this box? What are these teeth for?"

Miss Cynthia could not fully explain the mystery. She dimly remembered hearing her grandmother say that Uncle Jeremiah Breyfogle's false teeth might come in useful some day; she knew they had cost a sight of money. The teeth rattled realistically as the twins dropped them into a niche in the prospective bonfire. The box was reserved for a doll's trunk.

The pile grew fast after that; Nellie Ryan smilingly assisted; so did the helpful and ubiquitous William. Hopelessly maimed furniture, strange shrunken shoes, laced with mould and cobwebs, leaking overshoes in odd sizes, curious headgear of every antiquated fashion, broken umbrellas, theological books and pamphlets, bundles of old periodicals yellowed with age, remnants of wall-paper, bunches of odourless herbs—passed down the stairs and out into the unaccustomed light of day like a procession of dismal old ghosts.

And now Miss Cynthia was delving with determined

zeal into the row of trunks and boxes which lurked darkly beneath the eaves. Here were stores of ancient, moth-corrupted muffs and collars, smelling evilly of camphor and tobacco; queer old cloaks and dresses, dropping to pieces with age; yellowed underclothing, breathing a lonesome aroma of desolation; rolls of pieces, breadths of forgotten fabrics—she heaped them all under the open sky-light. “Are any of these good for anything, to anybody?” she asked hopelessly.

Nellie Ryan shook her pretty head. “The linen would drop to pieces if you tried to bleach it, ma’am,” she said, “and the other things are too queer and old-fashioned for folks now-a-days.”

“If they had been given away forty years ago somebody might have been glad of them,” mused Miss Cynthia. “But now—take them all down and put them on the bonfire.”

A zealous antiquarian would doubtless have shuddered at the vandalisms committed by Miss Cynthia during the next hour. An actual lust for space—for emptiness—had laid hold upon her. Her small, colourless face glowed, her blue eyes burned

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with iconoclastic fires, as she raked forth the long-venerated relics of by-gone days.

“Anything that is good for anybody to use we’ll give away,” she said; “the rest shall be burned. I’m not going to *save—anything*.”

The Puffer twins, their curly red heads topped by huge, flower-decked bonnets, gambolled joyously in the midst of the parti-coloured heaps.

“You can have anything you like for your dolls,” Miss Cynthia told them recklessly.

Nellie Ryan’s bright eyes rested inquiringly upon a pile of gay-coloured light silks and muslins. “What am I to do with these, ma’am?” she asked. “They’re too good to burn up, and I’m afraid poor people couldn’t use them. There’s real pretty lace on this dress.” She held up a thin, India silk of a delicate peach-blossom pink.

Miss Cynthia stared at it thoughtfully. “How I did want to wear that silk—once,” she murmured. “I was so tired of black; but I wasn’t allowed to have it because somebody had just died—a cousin of mother’s, I think. It is pretty, isn’t it?”

“Why don’t you wear it now?” demanded Harriet

Puffer, who had added a green silk mantilla and a scarlet cashmere scarf to her costume.

"Why don't *I* wear it?" echoed Miss Cynthia. "Why, all my dresses are black. I've always worn black, you know."

Nellie Ryan was surveying her mistress with new interest. Miss Day had always appeared hopelessly plain and middle-aged in her young eyes. Now, she was forced to admit, that with her abundant brown hair ruffled into tiny waves and her cheeks faintly flushed, Miss Cynthia was looking really young, and, yes—actually pretty. It was a surprising idea to Nellie. "I don't see, ma'am, why you should always wear black," she said doubtfully. "Why couldn't you have some of these pretty things made over and wear them?"

Miss Cynthia smoothed the soft folds of the peach-blossom silk with a tremulous little hand. "*I should* like to wear a pink dress," she breathed. "I've nearly always been obliged to wear black, and pretty soon——"

She waited a little in a breathless silence, then she said faintly, "I—suppose everybody up in heaven

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wears white—forever and ever. Did you ever hear of an angel wearing a pink dress, Nellie, or a blue one? ”

“No, ma’am,” replied Nellie promptly. She had never laid eyes upon one of Botticelli’s or Fra Angelico’s pictured angels in their gay clothing. “Yes’m, I guess they always wear white,” she went on, “made up something like a nightgown, an’ with long feather wings behind.”

Miss Cynthia sighed. These were her own regretful conclusions.

“All that I’ve seen in pictures are about one style,” proceeded Nellie, tilting her pretty head thoughtfully. “Just plain white, with a round neck, sort of low ; and sometimes there’s a breast-pin on one shoulder, to hold the fulness, I suppose. They ’most always wear their hair down their back, and no shoes or stockings. I sh’d think they’d look real queer, shouldn’t you, ma’am? There’s pictures of ’em like that in our ‘Pilgrim’s Progress.’ ”

Miss Cynthia was sitting up very straight ; she had spread out the pink silk dress across her lap. “I might as well,” she said thoughtfully. “Malvina

Bennett will be glad of the work. Yes, I will have a pink dress, and a blue one, too. I should like a red dress for next winter, and a warm brown one, the colour of ripe nuts, for fall, and a soft, cool, green one for summer. There are so many pretty colours, when you think of it, Nellie!"

Miss Cynthia was making a rapid division of the articles on the floor. "Some of these will be pretty for you to wear, Nellie, when—when you are married," she said softly. "Put them away till then, and these you may hang in the spare-room closet."

"Oh!" gasped the girl, in a stupor of wonder and delight. "All these pretty things for *me*? Oh, how good you are, Miss Day!"

"We'll set aside some of the furniture for you, too," pursued Miss Cynthia. "I—I should like to help you to be happy. It must be——"

She stopped short, her blue eyes brimming with a wistful light. "Everybody ought to be happy—*sometime*," she said.

And Nellie Ryan hurried downstairs to tell Bill that Miss Cynthia was a real angel, even if she didn't wear feather wings.

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At twilight, when the robins were singing rapturously in the budding elms, the bonfire was lighted. Miss Cynthia and the Puffer twins watched it. How the flames did roar and sparkle in scarlet and yellow splendour as they devoured the flotsam and jetsam of lives swept away so long ago in the inexorable flood of years. Very soon little remained save a heap of glowing coals. Miss Cynthia regarded them with vague sadness. She was wondering why *things* lasted so much longer than their owners. The vision of a life eternal appeared so ghostly dim, so far-away, so hopelessly shadowed with strong-scented funeral flowers and shrouds and coffins and chill, damp graves and cold, reticent tombstones.

“Do you ever think much about going to—to heaven, children?” she asked the twins, who stood quietly hand in hand watching the fitful flames, as they rose and sank and hovered, spirit-like, over the vanished form of the three-legged stool.

“Not if we c’n help it,” said Harriet promptly. “We don’t want to be buried up. You have to be buried up ’fore you can go to heaven.”

“But you know it’s only our poor, frail bodies that

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are buried," argued Miss Cynthia, in a small, weak voice. "Our ransomed souls go to heaven—if we are only good."

"We aren't good," said Harriet firmly. "An' we don't want to go to heaven. You have to wear a crown an' play on a harp in heaven, an' we don't want to play on a harp; we don't want wings, either. Do you?"

"No," said Miss Cynthia, distinctly. "I do not."

"What's the use of talkin' 'bout it then?" asked Harriet blandly.

"Sometimes—people—have to die, whether they want to or not," faltered Miss Cynthia. The terrible little pain pricked her as she spoke.

"We don't b'lieve we'll die, anyway," said Harriet doggedly. "Once, our Sunday-school teacher said we'd ought to think 'bout dying. So we tried. We held our breath a *aweful* long time, till we got just as red as fire in our faces. 'N' we foun' out 'at you've just *gotta* live. You can't help it. That fire's just right now to pop corn on. Come on an' get the popper, Ed!"

"It's really quite a long time till next spring,"

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thought Miss Cynthia, as she looked up through the swaying elms, through which bright stars were beginning to peep like friendly eyes. "Perhaps—if I don't think about it—I'll forget. I wish I could forget!"

"Supper's ready, ma'am!" called Nellie Ryan, thrusting her rosy face out at the door. "An' I've built a beautiful bright fire in the dining room!"

At bedtime Miss Cynthia perused three long and difficult chapters in her regular course of Bible reading. She was engaged in reading the Bible through for the twenty-seventh time since the days when the nightly exercise had constituted one of the dreaded "stents." The three chapters, with her morning psalm, she had always regarded vaguely as a bloodless sacrifice on the altar of a "jealous God."

On this occasion the evening offering consisted of three chapters from Chronicles, full of curious names, hard to pronounce. Miss Cynthia toiled bravely through them, paying anxious heed to the many-syllabled words. She was haunted by an uneasy sense that she ought to be unusually religious, in view of the event which loomed terribly in her near future.

She wondered timidly if Bukkiah and Jesharelah and Azareel and Jeremoth and all the others of those long-dead sons of Gedaliah were wearing white dresses, made up like nightgowns, with breast-pins on the shoulders, and long feather wings behind; and if she herself, similarly attired, would be obliged to meet them on that awesome sea of glass mingled with fire. The prospect was somehow singularly depressing.

She remained long on her knees, striving to frame into acceptable rhetoric a series of innocently hypocritical petitions, which she weakly hoped would gratify the Breyfogle conception of deity.

The Breyfogle God was possessed of a terrible, cold, unwinking eye, immovably fixed in the region directly above the ceiling of her bedroom. His large, attentive, critical ear bent down from a dreadful height for the express purpose of listening to what she had to say about her soul, and about the heathen, and about the community in which she lived. Miss Cynthia had always been especially zealous for the heathen.

When at last all was finished she climbed into her chilly bed and lay there crying quietly. "I don't

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see why I want to live so!" she moaned to herself—the Self who is always unobtrusively ready to listen to our weak complainings, to our futile regrets, to our voiceless aspirations. "But, oh, I do want to live! I want to be happy like other folks. Why should I have to go to heaven now? I've been expecting something to happen all these years—something—*beautiful!* But it hasn't happened—yet. I wish it would happen right away. I wish I had friends, and some pretty clothes—pink dresses and blue. I wish—I wish——"

Who can explain what actually happens to us when we sleep? Does the unseen self slip out into the vast, gray void and wander far—far from its inert shell? Do strange, wise helpers find it there in that dim border-land, staggering beneath its burden of pitiful wants? Do they plead with it—to *understand?*

X

At exactly six-thirty by the clock on Thursday morning Deacon Scrimger tied his dejected white horse, drawing a roomy spring wagon, to the hitching post in front of the Breyfogle house on Maple Street. Nellie Ryan was sweeping the front piazza with long, even strokes of her broom, but she stopped short to watch the old man as he crunched briskly up the gravel walk.

He was very thin and angular, was Deacon Scrimger, so stooped that his large, lean, aquiline old face appeared to be curiously attached to the front of his body. He moved with an agile nimbleness of foot which somehow offended the youthful eyes of the girl. "I've called around to git the stuff," he began, with a preliminary wheeze and snuffle like that of a rusty engine. "I says to m' wife, I c'n save Cynthia Day a deal of trouble, I says, fust an' last, by jest haulin' the hull outfit over to my place. No doubt some of

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it 'll want fixin' up—it bein' old stuff, an' I'll ten' t' that; arterward, we'll see to disposin' of it to the right parties. I'll jest take it right out now, if you'll show me where 't is."

"Does Miss Day expect you?" asked Nellie coldly.

"Why, cert'nly, my good girl, cert'nly; I tol' her a-Sunday I'd call eround. If she ain't up yit there's no use to disturb her. I'll jest look the stuff over an' take my pick right now; I dunno as I c'n haul it all one trip, but 'tain't fur."

"I'll have to ask Miss Day," said Nellie, with a disdainful smile, "and I never disturb her until seven o'clock."

"The' 's the cause of foreign missions," pursued Deacon Scrimger thoughtfully, as he edged past the girl so as to command a view of the front hall, "an' the paster's salary more 'n a hunderd dollars in arrears, an' no way to git it, times bein' hard an' money close, an' nec'sary repairs on the meetin'-house roof. I figur' 'at I c'n turn this 'ere occasion into one of rejoicin' fer the cause, an' at the same time—— Was these 'ere the articles?"

"Miss Day intends to set them out in the front yard

at ten o'clock, an' let people take their pick," said Nellie stonily. "Mr. and Mrs. Pettibone are coming, an' they'll help see that the right folks get their share."

"The' ain't a particle o' use o' all that," argued Deacon Scrimger amiably. "It 'll tromp up the front yard turrible; I don't s'pose she's thought of that; an' more 'n likely the most undeservin' folks in town 'll be on han'. 'Tain't right to *give* things away, anyhow. 'Tain't law, an' 'tain't gospil, if you git right down to it. Folks 'd ought to pay fer what they git in this world. They don't value nothin' 'at they don't pay fer in hard cash."

"Did you want to buy the things, sir?"

Deacon Scrimger scratched his head thoughtfully. "Well!" he ejaculated at length. "I—was thinkin' of haulin' the stuff over to my place, as I tol' ye; an' arter I'd put it in order, sellin' it fer a low price to d'servin' folks as 'd ought to hev it. You see I c'd ten' to that part of it as she can't, bein' a female. The resultin' cash I'd 'lotted to donate to the church, reservin' a small sum to compensate me fer my trouble. That's the idee, an' it's a good one. An' say! I

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shan't mind givin' you, well—say a dollar fer yer good will."

"Do you mean that if I let you take all these things away now without telling Miss Day that you'll give me a dollar?"

"Well, I dunno 's I'd put it jest that way, but—yes, that's about the idee. I won't pay ye, though, till the stuff 's delivered."

"But what would you do if Miss Day objected to your plan when she found it out. She'll be coming down pretty soon."

"Tee—hee—hee!" giggled Deacon Scrimger. "You ain't nobody's fool, be ye? It's somethin' like this, m' gal, she giv' out in public meetin' that she was calc'latin' to give away the stuff to *anybody* that wanted it. Now *I* want it. I want the hull of it, fer r'ligious purposes, as I tol' ye. 'F I take it on those air conditions I guess she 'd find it purty middlin' hard to git a-holt of it agin, even if she went to law 'bout it. D' ye understan'?"

"Yes, I do," said Nellie Ryan, her pretty face in a blaze of indignation. "And do you know what I think of you? I think you're a horrid, mean old

skinflint, that's what you are! A lot you'd give it to the church, wouldn't you? An' you'd give me a dollar, indeed! What do you take me for?"

"I take ye fer a mighty sassy little tyke, that's what I take ye fer! You'd ought to be switched right smart fer talkin' that way to me. But, say!" The old man's manner suddenly changed—"mebbe I didn't offer ye 'nough. S'pose we say a dollar down, right now, an'—well, I don't care if I make it a dollar an' a half extry, arter——"

"Stop!" cried Nellie, stamping her foot. "Don't you talk to me no more. I'll tell Miss Day what you've said. I'll tell everybody you——"

"An' I'll tell everybody you lie," retorted the old man, eyeing the girl malevolently. "I'll tell 'em—— Well, you jest hold your horses fer a spell an' see what happens. Mebbe you'll be sorry yit 'at you've been so mighty brash. I'll be eround agin."

He hopped nimbly into his wagon and rattled away, and Nellie Ryan, breathing hard, marched into the kitchen and broke the treasured cracked tea-cup and two plates in the stormy process of getting breakfast.

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Miss Cynthia merely laughed when the girl told her what had happened.

“That was certainly a bright idea of Deacon Scrimger’s,” she agreed, “and it would undoubtedly save us trouble.”

The little lady’s eyes were very bright and her cheeks were actually pink as she helped to carry the smaller articles into the fresh, bright morning. She was wearing a blue dress, hastily constructed by Malvina Bennett. The Puffer twins put in a busy but delightful hour before school time, and George Blossom and William Cartright—commonly known as Bill—cleared the big rooms in an astonishingly short space of time.

Heavy curtains of dignified brocade; dingy, old-fashioned shades; musty carpets, their colours religiously preserved through years of use; stuffed furniture; footstools innumerable; fancy work and bric-a-brac of every degree of hideousness trooped out into the green yard in a long procession. Clothing, too, of every sort and description; queer full-skirted dresses and nondescript hats; broadcloth coats with long voluminous tails, dating back to Grandfather

Breyfogle's time; greatcoats, waistcoats, and trousers, canes, umbrellas, and shoes—all looking shabby and ashamed in the light of the radiant spring morning. Miss Cynthia, surveying them hopelessly, was moved to wish that a strong wind might sweep them all away, like the withered and forgotten leaves of yester year. The stupendous tides of Life stirred strangely in her blood; for the first time she dimly sensed the fact that old things must pass away before the on-rushing flood of the new.

"I don't believe anybody will want one of these things," she said. "I don't see how anybody can want them."

But at nine o'clock the street began to fill with people. A stranger coming into Innisfield on that Thursday morning might have guessed that a fair or a circus procession was in progress.

As a matter of fact a stranger did come to town, and, seeing the vehicles hitched to every convenient post and the people congregated in little gossiping knots on every street corner, asked a few casual questions. The answers he received filled him with curiosity and astonishment. He was a tall man, with

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a strong, clean-shaven face and a pair of youthful, dark eyes which belied his gray hair.

“ ’Tain’t an auction, ’xactly,” one old farmer informed him. “ I do’ know what you’d call it. We come to town to see the show more’n anythin’ else; but I b’lieve m’ wife’s got a marble-topped table an’ some kind of a fancy book. She’s always been han-kerin’ arter one of them tables with a grave-stun top sence we was married, but we ain’t seen our way clear to gittin’ it. I tol’ m’ wife I’d feel kind o’ shabby ’bout takin’ it home, seein’ we didn’t pay nothin’ fer it, but she says she was fair urged to take it. Miss Day, she jest insisted. It doos beat all!”

“ Miss Day?” repeated the stranger inquiringly. “ I used to know a person by that name who lived about here—a Miss Cynthia Day.”

“ Same name,” the farmer told him with a chuckle. “ An’, my gracious! I guess she’s a-losin’ her mind! If you ever knew any o’ the fam’bly I reckon you’ll remember that the hull kit an’ caboodle of ’em was closer ’an the bark to a tree. They never give up anythin’ they onct got their han’s onto; you couldn’t git ’em to even think of it. Miss Cynthy is the last of

'em, an' a chip o' the old block, as we always s'posed; but she's took an awful curious turn all of a sudden, an' is givin' away pretty much everythin' in the house."

"Perhaps she means to move away," hazarded the stranger.

"No, that ain't it; she's repairin' her house, an' most likely wants to fix up bran' new. 'Tain't gittin' red of her things that's s'prised folks so; but it's the way she's gone about it. If she'd auctioned 'em off, nobody 'd have said anythin'; but to *give* 'em away—Gosh!"

The stranger thoughtfully made his way toward the Breyfogle house on Maple Street. He met numerous persons coming away, some laughing derisively, others solemnly content; nearly everybody carried something. Nobody noticed him when he quietly opened Miss Cynthia's gate and walked in.

A group of excited persons were arguing hotly over an armchair which seemed in danger of being rent in twain. The matter was presently settled by a small lady in a blue dress, who marched up to the combatants with an air of authority. "I've already

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given this chair to Sarah Hopkins," she said, "and this footstool; she needs them for her old mother."

The lady in the blue dress did not glance at the stranger; she was evidently exceedingly busy and very much in demand. But the stranger followed her with his eyes as she hurried away to another group.

"Were you looking for anything in particular, sir?" asked a polite voice at his elbow. He glanced down at the speaker. She was a little woman, with a fluff of light-brown hair shading childish eyes. "I am the minister's wife," she went on with a pretty air of importance, "and I am trying to help distribute these gifts of Miss Day's to the best advantage. It's a beautiful idea, isn't it?"

"I don't think I quite understand it," he said, his dark eyes full of a laughing light. "Just why is Miss Day giving her things away?"

"Do you know her?" demanded Mrs. Pettibone.

"I used to know her," he answered. "I knew something of—the family when I was a boy. You probably don't remember me. I remember you as Miss Philura Rice."

The minister's wife stared hard at the stranger.

"Why you're not——"

"I am James Blake," he said briefly. "I left Innisfield about fifteen years ago."

The minister's wife continued to gaze earnestly at him, and he laughed apologetically. "I suppose you are wondering why I'm here now. Really, I don't know. I happened to be in Boston, and concluded to take a look at the old place."

"I'm real glad you've come," said Mrs. Pettibone hospitably. "I remember you very well now; of course you'll——"

"I'm going back to town directly," he told her hastily. "In fact I must go now—this minute; I've an important engagement." He consulted his watch.

"Did you bring your wife with you?" cordially inquired the minister's wife. "I should so much like to have you both stop to dinner with us at the parsonage; Mr. Pettibone would be delighted. You really must n't go away without——"

"I didn't bring my wife," he told her quizzically. He seemed to have forgotten his pressing engagement. His eyes were upon Miss Cynthia, who was

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standing on the steps talking to a very large woman in a fortress-like bonnet. "She's changed very little," he said.

"You mean Mrs. Buckthorn? She's the sort of person who doesn't change, you know," said the minister's wife. She was thinking very hard, was Mrs. Pettibone, and to very little purpose. "I expect Electa Pratt would remember," she thought aloud.

James Blake smiled observantly. "Is Electa Pratt still in evidence?" he asked. "If she is, she certainly would remember—what, for example?"

"I was only trying to think," murmured Mrs. Pettibone, very much confused. "I was wondering——"

"I think I should like to speak to Miss Day," he said. "Will you—will you present me? She will have forgotten me, I'm sure."

Mrs. Pettibone flushed an agitated pink. "She is coming to speak to me now," she said.

Miss Cynthia in her blue dress, with her brown hair ruffled into tiny waves, came swiftly across the grass. She still did not appear to notice the tall stranger who waited at Mrs. Pettibone's side. There had been so many strangers and so many old friends and neigh-

bours. Nearly everything had been given away, and the remaining articles had been marked "Reserved" by the minister's careful hand. She was happier than she had ever been in her life in the unaccustomed glow of making other people happy. So it did not surprise her in the least when Mrs. Pettibone caught her warmly by the hand. "An old friend," she murmured, "perhaps you will remember." Then the minister's little wife slipped away and left the two standing there together.

Miss Cynthia looked up and met the dark eyes of the tall man. He was smiling down at her with a half admiring, half quizzical glance. "Now I wonder," he said softly, "if you have the slightest idea who I am? It's a long, long while since you've seen me, and the years haven't been kind to me, as you can plainly see. *You* are changed very little, Miss Day."

Miss Cynthia drew a deep breath. Then she smiled a wistful, mysterious sort of a smile. "How strange that you should come back—*now*," she said.

"Then you do remember me?" He was puzzled by her look, which seemed to lend a strange aloofness to

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her small person. "I should have known you anywhere," he added briskly. "But perhaps I'm hardly fair when I say that, for I've seen you once before—five years ago."

"Yes?" Her voice was gentle and abstracted—indifferent, the man thought.

"It was in Boston," he went on, in a matter of fact tone. "You were buying something in a shop; so was I. I thought at first I would speak to you, but——"

She looked at him with quiet understanding, "But you changed your mind," she finished. "I am glad you did not speak to me then."

"Luckily I'm not planning to bore you now," he went on, with an embarrassed little laugh. "I really can't tell you why I came here at all. A curious desire to see the place overtook me. One cannot account for the freaks of impulse, you know. And this—this——" He glanced about the disordered yard with a slight lifting of his broad shoulders. "What impelled you, Miss Day, to distribute your cherished ancestral belongings to the countryside at large?"

"Don't you *know*?" she asked in a choked little whisper. "Can't you guess?"

Manifestly he could not, for he was regarding her with astonishment, not unmixed with dismay.

"I think you ought to know—*you*," she went on. "Because it was for *this*—I—sent you away. I lied to you—then—because——"

He frowned perplexedly. "Oh, I had forgotten all that," he said with cheerful decision. "A boy and girl affair—one can afford to forget or laugh at it all, when one's hair turns gray."

"Have you forgotten? Do you laugh—when you think of it?" she asked wonderingly. "I have never laughed to think that——"

"I beg that you will not think of it again," he interposed hastily. "It is not worth while, I assure you."

Miss Cynthia did not seem to have heard his last words. "I am glad you came. I wanted to see you," she said, with a happy little sigh. "It seems to—to match—everything else."

"You're very good to say that," he cried, pulling out his watch; "it makes me sorry that I must bid you good-bye. I had almost forgotten my train."

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Her little hand lay for a moment in his, the strange aloof happiness of her look brimming over in two large, bright tears. "Good-bye," she said softly, and turned away. She did not look at him again.

He saw that much as he strode away down the street, for he deliberately turned and looked back.

XI

MISS ROSALIE SCOTT, having arranged and rearranged her girlish possessions in her grandmother's well-rubbed mahogany chest of drawers, and hung and rehung the pictures and ornaments on her newly-papered walls, and admired for the hundredth time the sweet freshness of the metamorphosed parlour, was feeling slightly bored with life. There was, to be sure, plenty of good, wholesome work to occupy her time in the big farmhouse. "Helping mother" was a broad and comprehensive term which seemed to the young girl's impatient fancy to involve slow years, spent in endless, irritating duties.

Mother Scott was sweet and placid as she compassed her unvarying round; indeed, to her daughter's secret wonderment, she actually seemed to enjoy herself in a staid, elderly fashion. But she appeared (to Rosalie) to regard her young daughter as entirely ready to become staid and elderly, too.

Rosalie's education—including three terms of painting lessons and four years of piano lessons—had been

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expensive; but it was now well over. There was a new piano in the parlour, and over it hung a water-colour painting of a yard of pansies. These objects represented very concretely the ornamental side of the young woman's attainments. For the rest, she was vaguely supposed to have assimilated the contents of the pile of dull-coloured text-books which had been incontinently consigned to the attic. She did her hair becomingly and wore her clothes stylishly. Father and Mother Scott exchanged stealthy glances of delight over her pretty, uncommon ways. Her tall, well-rounded figure, her smooth, abundant dark hair, her flashing white teeth, her sparkling, long-lashed eyes were a perpetual wonder and delight to them. They were complacently glad that they had been able to "do for Rosalie." But all was now completed—finished. Nothing remained to be expected or desired beyond the monotonous though perfectly comfortable level of the present, which stretched away into an equally monotonous and comfortable future.

With the girl, herself, it was vastly different. She was merely waiting—though quite unconsciously—

for something wonderful to happen. She did not picture to herself what this wonderful something was to be; but she nevertheless longed for it with ill-concealed impatience.

When, therefore, George Blossom, driving his new phaeton, and wearing a smart ready-made suit, appeared at the Scott farmhouse, he was made very welcome by Miss Rosalie. Almost any interruption which offered to break the colourless monotony of her every-day life would have been welcome; but when the interruption took the shape of a good-looking young man (wearing passable clothes and a really creditable necktie) Miss Rosalie exhibited an elation which alarmed her prudent mother.

“I don’t want you should encourage him to come here too much, daughter,” purred the anxious matron, hovering uncertainly about her daughter, as she stood before her mirror patting and pulling herself into shape as a bird preens its feathers. “Of course the Blossoms are real nice folks, an’ all that; but——”

The girl broke into a light trill of laughter. “Why, Mother Scott! do you suppose I’d *think* of such a thing?” she demanded. “He’s only a common

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workingman. But I suppose I've got to be decently polite to him, haven't I? I do wish we lived in the city; things are so different there. The girls at school would be *so* amused to think I actually had a call from a young man who papered and painted our house!"

She shrugged her pretty shoulders in a way she had learned from her French teacher, and her mother breathed an anxious sigh. "Dear me!" she murmured, as the girl left the room, "it is such a task to bring up a girl. I wonder——" She paused to straighten the silver trifles on the dressing-table, then went down to her kitchen, her honest American heart filled with vague reproaches.

George Blossom had a great deal to say for himself. He was not at all a timid young man, and he exhibited a certain masculine masterfulness of manner, to which Miss Rosalie responded with brief sentences and fleeting smiles and pretty airs of deference.

"I wish," said Mr. Blossom confidently, "that you would let me drive you down to the village to call on Miss Day. She hasn't the remotest idea about the papers for her rooms, and yet she doesn't want me to

pick them out for her. Perhaps you could advise her; you have such beautiful taste, Miss Rosalie, and you know exactly what you want every time."

"That Miss Day must be an awfully queer person about 'most everything," said the girl, with one of her little shrugs. "I never heard of anything so amusing as that affair of hers last week. Just fancy pulling all sorts and conditions of things out of one's house and giving them away in that public manner! Really, I don't think I should have cared to have everybody see what I'd been saving up all those years. It must have been rather embarrassing, I should think."

"I hadn't thought of it in that light; but I guess it was rather queer of her," said Mr. Blossom, with an admiring look. "The fact is, I expect I'm responsible for the whole affair. I got into a pretty plain sort of a talk with her, and without really meaning to do so, I told her the truth about herself for once. She seemed dreadfully stirred up and in earnest by the time I got through. It was really that that put her up to giving her things away, though I haven't mentioned it to anyone else except mother."

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The girl lifted her pretty eyebrows. "What a dangerous person you must be," she said coquettishly. "I shall have to look out or you'll be telling me the truth about myself; I'm sure that would be awfully unpleasant!"

"I mean to do that some day," he told her.

"Mean to do what?" she asked, with the wide eyes of uncomprehending innocence.

"I mean to tell you the truth about yourself—and about myself." He held her dark eyes determinedly with his own. "But I can't do it *yet*. I shall wait till——"

"I'll advise you never to do anything of the kind!" breathed the girl, with a nervous little laugh. Her smooth cheeks were deeply flushed; her eyes shone; her strong brown hands trembled in her lap. This was life. It thrilled and interested her.

"I will ask mother if I may go with you to see that funny little Miss Day," she added, with a pretty air of condescension. "She must be one of the quaintest persons in the world—almost like a character in a book. I love to study quaint persons!"

"Do you know I'm not going to paint houses or

paper rooms all the rest of my life," he told her abruptly, when they were driving away through the gay young landscape. Her richly coloured face under its plumed black hat was turned toward him inquiringly.

"I'm going to study designing next year in earnest. In fact, I've commenced already. I'm taking a regular course in a correspondence school."

"You *are*?"

He nodded. "It's simply great! I'm putting in every minute I can get on it. It's fine to go away to school; but if you can't do that—— Anyway, I'm going in to win. Do you understand?"

"Do you know, I think it's awfully nice and ambitious for you to try and improve yourself," she drawled, bending her long neck to one side. "Everyone owes it to themselves to do what they can, I think."

"They owe it to other people, too," he said, staring hard at her handsome profile. "I'll tell you one thing, Rosalie, I shouldn't care a darn whether I improved or not, if it wasn't for——"

"But you ought to care, if there wasn't another

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person in the whole world," interrupted the girl, in a kindly didactic tone. She looked enchantingly pretty, but dangerous, as she said it.

The young man bit his lip frowningly. "Of course *you* don't care what I do," he said gloomily; "there's no reason why you should."

"Why, certainly I care!" she replied, with lifted eyebrows. "I'm always glad to see *everybody* improve."

He jerked his lines and spoke sharply to his horse; then appeared entirely absorbed in the resulting phenomena.

The girl sat silent, a slight smile of entire happiness dimpling the corners of her red lips.

"What a comfortable carriage this is," she said after a while, raising her voice a little as the wheels rattled over the loose stones.

"Glad you think so," he said tersely. "I bought it for mother."

She stole a sidelong glance at his stern young face. "How nice of you!" she murmured.

"Oh, I'm a pretty decent sort of a fellow for an ordinary workman," he answered, with a careless

flick at the brown horse. There was a queer aching lump in his throat; he swallowed hard to get rid of it.

"Oh, but you aren't an ordinary workman," she cooed. "You have lots and lots of talent. Anybody could see that."

"Do you think so!" He turned and beamed on her like a young god. "I believe I can do anything, Rosalie, if you'll only—only believe in me," he whispered.

The girl straightened herself with a pretty air of coldness. "I am always interested in talented persons," she said gently. "But isn't that Miss Day's house? How *improved* it is! It is astonishing what a coat of paint will do for a shabby old house. It looks positively rejuvenated. Really, do you know I should think you would be perfectly satisfied to work such miracles with your paint-pots and brushes. It's ever so much better than painting poor pictures or making poor designs!" She smiled brilliantly into his abashed face.

Miss Cynthia was eagerly glad to see them. She held the tall girl's hand in both her own and looked up at her wistfully. "How you have changed, my

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dear," she said. "It was so good of you to think of helping me in my task of picking out wall-papers. First, I think I want one thing, then I am quite sure I shall prefer something different, and it is all so confusing."

Miss Rosalie's bright eyes rested meditatively on the small person of her hostess. She was thinking that it was really very odd for a person of Miss Cynthia's age to care what sort of wall-papers she had, or what sort of clothes she wore. And Miss Cynthia so evidently did care. She was wearing a gown of soft, pale green, the colour of young leaves, enlivened with touches of white—the tender white of half-blown blossoms. Her cheeks were delicately flushed, and her blue eyes had somehow taken to themselves the soft, deep colour of early violets.

"She is really quite good-looking—considering," the girl told herself, with ingenuous surprise. "But I don't see what possible difference it can make to her now."

She was delightedly conscious that George Blossom had not noticed Miss Cynthia's finery, and that he was looking furtively, but persistently, at herself, his hon-

est eyes pleading with her to be kind. She was prettily indifferent to all this, was Rosalie, and so very sure of her accomplished self that she was quite ready to give her undivided attention to the subject of Miss Cynthia's wall-papers.

It was absurdly easy, for a person of artistic tastes and cultivated perceptions. 'A soft leaf-green was obviously the thing for the big southwest parlour. And the rather dark and narrow entrance hall must be illuminated with a cheerful, pale yellow, which would greet the incoming guest like a burst of sunlight. Nothing could be prettier for the dining room than a dull gold, with a frieze of ripe pumpkins and great shadowy leaves.

And so they went through the empty rooms, where only a bit of old-fashioned furniture remained here and there—a tiny work-table, a bookcase with queer, diamond-shaped glass, a mahogany sideboard with claw feet.

“These pieces of old furniture are simply *dear!*” declared the girl. “But just what do you mean to put with them, now that you’ve given away all the rest?”

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Miss Cynthia hesitated. "I'm sure you will think me very odd," she said appealingly; "but all I gave away was so associated—with——. Do you know, my dear, I've never had a very good time—that is, not yet. Oh, I *do* hope you'll begin right away to have a good time—while you're young."

"I expect to," said Rosalie Scott, with conviction. "Why shouldn't I have a good time?"

She held her little chin very high, and her dark lashes cast bewitching shadows on her soft cheeks. But how palpably absurd it was for an elderly person, like Miss Cynthia, to think about having good times! She shrugged her shoulders gently and glanced side-wise at George Blossom. She felt sure that he would agree with her. "You were speaking of the furniture, were you not?" she reminded her hostess sweetly.

"Yes, I believe I was—of the furniture. I was going to tell you that I have in the attic, stored away by itself, some furniture that I did not give away. It has never been used since I can remember. It belonged to the Breyfogle family ever so far back. When mother was married she wanted to have things different, you know, so she refurnished all of the

rooms downstairs and most of the chambers. She wanted everything to be new and—yes, I suppose she liked her furniture to be fashionable; so she bought all black walnut, with a great deal of carving and gilt lines; the bureaux and tables all had white marble tops, and the carpets were covered with large wreaths of bright-coloured flowers. Perhaps you remember?”

Miss Scott nodded. “Dreadful, wasn’t it?” she said, with a brilliant smile. “The early Victorian style of furniture is quite as hideous as hoop-skirts. Really, I think you were sensible to get rid of it, even if you had to give it away.”

Miss Cynthia looked puzzled. “Everything was very nice and—and expensive,” she said doubtfully. “I gave it away because—because I was tired of keeping everything for myself. Besides I disliked it for—for other reasons. The furniture upstairs is as old-fashioned as can be; but I thought it would do for the little while——”

“I wish you’d show it to me,” said Rosalie, her girlish curiosity getting the better of her. “*Is* it mahogany? Mahogany is all the rage now.”

“Is it?” said Miss Cynthia vaguely. “Really, I

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didn't notice. The pieces are of some dark wood, I know, very old and queer. If you won't mind coming upstairs I shall be glad to show them to you."

The girl burst into a little ecstatic shriek of surprise and delight when her eyes fell upon the dusty shapes huddled together in a dark corner of the Breyfogle attic. "Oh!" she cried. "What a find! You are certainly a lucky person. Do you know these are the dearest, sweetest, loveliest old mahogany! To think of their being packed away up here in the dark all these years!"

"Are they really nice?" asked Miss Cynthia, in unaffected surprise. "I'm glad if they're really good for something. I should like the rooms to look pretty and—different."

"Pretty!" echoed Miss Scott. "Do look at that sofa! Isn't it the sweetest thing! and those chairs, and that exquisite table! And not one piece broken, or even marred! I never heard of such a thing!"

The girl was really carried out of herself with delight. "You know I learned all about the value of Colonial furniture, and all that sort of thing, when I was in school in Boston," she went on, with a serious

air of superior culture. "I went through our attic the minute I got home; but we never had such perfectly *exquisite* things as these."

"They have been in the family for generations," observed Miss Cynthia, with a touch of her vanished pride. "We always kept everything; and we took good care of everything we kept. Mother and Abby Whiton used to rub these things with wax every year at house-cleaning time, I remember. But mother thought them very ugly and old-fashioned."

"The idea!" laughed the girl. "Well, you'll have the most stylish house imaginable. Do let me help arrange it when it is ready; won't you?"

"I shall be so glad if you will," Miss Cynthia told her.

Her blue eyes beamed upon the two young people, with innocent pleasure in their supposed happiness.

"George—Mr. Blossom has told me all about your pretty rooms," she went on. "I hope he can make my old walls look just as pretty. Then we can do the rest."

Rosalie's scarlet lip curled cruelly. "We found Mr. Blossom a most careful and conscientious workman,"

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she drawled indifferently. "I am recommending him to all of our friends."

The young man grew suddenly pale. He turned on his heel to conceal the uncontrollable quiver of his boyish mouth.

"I think I must ask you to take me home now, Mr. Blossom; mother will be growing anxious," Miss Rosalie concluded, with a nice propriety of manner.

Miss Cynthia watched the two uneasily, as they walked down to the front gate, the girl smiling and brilliant, the boy still pale and downcast.

"Oh!" murmured Miss Cynthia, "*I'm—afraid!*" She lifted one fragile little hand to the breast of her gay spring gown and held it there, while the smiling girl and the unhappy-looking boy drove away down the street.

XII

ONE warm morning in the latter part of June Mrs. Pettibone stood tapping lightly at Miss Cynthia Day's side door. After she had knocked, the little lady quietly surveyed the house in its trim purity and perfection; the gravelled walks, the velvet lawn dappled with leaf shadows were pleasant to the eye; so were the clear windows, revealing cool glimpses of dainty curtains of lace and muslin. Mrs. Pettibone had been intensely interested in the changes which had taken place in the old Breyfogle house. The subsequent generous donations of money which had repaired the church and parsonage, and enabled the minister to go away for a much-needed holiday, had aroused her to a sincere gratitude mingled with a sense of lively curiosity.

Ostensibly, she had come to thank Miss Cynthia for her generosity and thoughtfulness. Inwardly, she was determined to find out why a descendant of the Breyfogle family should thus suddenly have deflected from the hereditary standards of conduct.

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Miss Cynthia herself presently opened the door. She smiled wanly into the face of her pastor's wife. There were violet shadows under her blue eyes (Mrs. Pettibone observed) and her little hands trembled. She was wearing a youthful gown of pink muslin, beruffled and befrilled, and a broad white hat laden with pink roses shaded her colourless face.

"You were going out this morning!" exclaimed Mrs. Pettibone apologetically. "No, indeed; I won't come in. I just stopped for a moment to thank you; you have been so *very* kind and generous."

"But I was only going into the yard," Miss Cynthia protested. "I felt—lonely and—and tired this morning. I waked up in the night, and I couldn't go to sleep. You know how one thinks of all sorts of things—those that have happened already, and—and those that are—going to happen—not always pleasant things. I'm sure you think me *very* foolish."

"I guess most of us are foolish that way at one time or another," said the minister's wife comfortably. "I made up my mind long ago that the things we are afraid of in the night are not worth remembering the

next morning—in fact, we generally forget all about them as soon as the sun is up.”

“I wish you would come in and see my house,” said Miss Cynthia, with the air of one who determinedly changes the subject. “It is all finished at last, even to the kitchen. It has taken a long time—longer than I thought; but I wish I had it all to do over again.”

Mrs. Pettibone was frankly delighted with all that she saw in the renovated house. “I don’t see how you could have waited so long to do it,” she said. “But you,”—she looked thoughtfully at the girlish figure of her hostess,—“you have changed more than the house. I don’t believe I should have known you—if a year ago I had suddenly come face to face with you in that pink gown.”

“I suppose you think I’ve taken leave of my senses,” murmured Miss Cynthia, with a defiant lifting of her small head. “Almost everybody does think so, I have been told. But I don’t care. It doesn’t make any difference what——”

“I think you are a wise woman, my dear,” Mrs. Pettibone made haste to interpose. “You ought to

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know what I would be likely to think." She lapsed into a thoughtful silence, then added in a low voice, "If you only looked—*happier*. Sometimes, I have wondered——"

"I am happier than I have ever been before in my life," Miss Cynthia told her doggedly. "I never did anything I really wanted to until this spring. Then—I—made up my mind that I might as well—*try*—to have a good time the way—the way other people do. Yesterday I played dolls all day long with the Puffer twins—because when I was a little girl I was never allowed to waste my time with dolls. I haven't thought yet what I want to do next; but when I do I shall hurry and do it right away. I—I must hurry because the days go so—fast. I never knew a summer to go away so fast. It is the last of June already, and——"

She gripped her small hands together in her lap. "Don't you know of some way to make the days go slow?" she asked the minister's wife, with a dreary little smile. "I used to think the time dragged so; but it doesn't now. Even a long, long night goes away so quickly. It is morning before I know it."

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Mrs. Pettibone looked sweetly puzzled. "I don't see," she said, "why you should want the days to pass slowly. Every day is sure to bring something beautiful with it, and the years are bearing us on to something more beautiful still."

She stopped and looked carefully at her hostess; Miss Cynthia sat stonily quiet, her small hands still gripped in her lap. "You are thinking about heaven, I suppose," she said dryly. "That is all very well if you haven't got to go there. I don't believe anybody really *wants* to go to heaven. I don't. I want to stay in this world—a long time. *I want to!*"

"Then you will," Mrs. Pettibone spoke in a tone of comfortable conviction. "Don't you remember that 'every one that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened'?"

"That's in the Bible," said Miss Cynthia, with a spent breath of long weariness. "I've read my Bible through twenty-six times; I'm reading it for the twenty-seventh time now. But I—I don't like to read the Bible. I think it's tiresome. There isn't a bit of use in my pretending anything else."

"Why do you read it then?" asked Mrs. Pettibone

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unexpectedly. "I shouldn't read a word of it, if I didn't want to."

"You wouldn't!"

"No."

"But—oh, I *must* read it—and—and pray. I should be frightened not to pray." Miss Cynthia had grown even paler; her breath came in little hurried gasps.

Mrs. Pettibone didn't appear to notice. She vaguely understood by this time that she was dealing with that very terrible thing—a naked soul. "God knows all about what you really want, even if you don't mention it," she said in a low, shaken voice. "When you really *want* something you must believe that *God can* give it to you, and that he *wants* to give it to you even *more than you want it*."

Miss Cynthia shivered. "I always think of—*God*—as—watching me, always watching—and displeased—angry. I am not resigned. I just can't say 'Thy will be done.' *I don't want it to be done!*"

Mrs. Pettibone leaned forward in her chair; her eyes were radiant. "I used to think just that way," she said. "And I was ugly to look at and lonesome and

forlorn, and I believed that it was God's will that I should stay that way till I died. I thought that perhaps if I bore it all with resignation I should go to heaven—a queer sort of place, I supposed it was, my dear; and I didn't want to go at all. But I thought God couldn't find that out if I only went to church regularly and said my prayers night and morning. I never dared to pray for anything I really wanted."

She paused to laugh aloud—a triumphant, jubilant little laugh of pure delight and happiness. "One day I heard a woman say that whether we think so or not *God is good*—all sorts of good—anything, everything I could think of that *I wanted*; not what somebody else thought I ought to want, but what *I* wanted, down deep in my heart.

"At first, I hardly dared to believe it—I had grown such a coward—but I did a funny thing, I am sure you will say; I wrote out a list of the things I wanted. And I'm going to tell you what they were, though I've never told anybody else but my husband. I wanted two new dresses, and a silk petticoat—one of the nice rustly ones, you know, and a hat with ostrich

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plumes and a long, soft, curly feather boa. I was *so ashamed* to think I wanted such foolish things. But I did want them; *and I got every one of them!* I have that feather boa yet, and I never put it on without thinking, 'this was a present from my Father.' It's such a beautiful thought. Why, it makes everything in the whole world beautiful! *I don't know all that God is, my dear; but I do know that he is all good.*

"There was something else I wanted, too." Mrs. Pettibone sighed and smiled reminiscently, while a girlish colour flushed her cheeks. "That was the biggest and best thing I asked for. It was so wonderful that I hesitated, at first. You don't remember me as I was then—a regular old maid—yes, that's exactly what I was, and not a man I had ever known had once looked at me, as—as men do look at the woman they are going to love." Mrs. Pettibone glanced questioningly at Miss Cynthia, and Miss Cynthia's blue eyes answered.

"I did long to have somebody love me—*like that*. And so I asked God for—a husband; and I *believed* he would send me one, and he did. How surprised I

was when I found out who it was. I had never once thought of such a thing—truly, I never had; he seemed so wise and grand, so much above me! But he began to love me then, and he has never stopped a minute since. Oh, my dear, God is so *kind*, so *generous*! I wish you would just try him and see if he won't give you everything you want."

"But I—I am not good like you," faltered Miss Cynthia. "I am not resigned, or willing to submit, not one bit. I'm stiff-necked and rebellious. And you know what it says in the Bible about such people."

"You're rebellious just because you think God doesn't want to give you what you want," Mrs. Pettibone said wisely. "And you're stiff-necked because you're determined to have it. It's such hard work to be stiff-necked, my dear; and didn't you know that you never want a thing *very* much unless God wants you to have it? I don't know what it is that you want, and I am not going to ask. But don't read your Bible and pray just because you think it's your duty. I should never read another word of the Bible till I was hungry for it."

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The little woman, having delivered herself of these heterodox opinions, arose and kissed Miss Cynthia on each cheek, after the fashion of women. "You've grown pretty," she said softly, "and your house is beautiful. I can see that you're all ready to be happy. Now just *be happy!*"

Miss Cynthia's Breyfogle conscience, trained to strenuous theological combat through successive generations of Puritan ancestors, advanced at once to the fray, as the door closed upon the retreating form of the minister's wife.

"That woman is anti-Christ. Don't you know that 'our God is a consuming fire'?" shouted the Breyfogle conscience, quoting Scripture with disconcerting fluency. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

"I am going to try wanting and expecting," said Miss Cynthia obstinately.

"You'll be cast into outer darkness, if you do; there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth!"

"I intend to believe that God loves me."

"Remember that you are trembling on the verge of the tomb!"

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“I shall try to have a good time while I do live.”

“She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth,” quoted the Breyfogle conscience, which appeared to have memorised most of the severe and threatening texts of the Bible, and used them without regard for the context.

“I don’t believe it,” contradicted Miss Cynthia faintly.

“You should crucify your affections and desires, not pamper them.”

“I don’t want to crucify them,” murmured Miss Cynthia doggedly.

When pretty Nellie Ryan called her mistress to dinner, she was surprised to observe the change which had taken place in her small, wistful face since breakfast time.

It was indeed no longer wistful, but flushed and expectant.

“Have you ever wanted things, Nellie, that you thought you couldn’t have?” asked Miss Cynthia, as the girl filled her glass. She liked to have her pretty young servant linger in the dining room while she ate, and Nellie, perceiving this, had been pleasantly

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flattered by it, though it was not the fashion in Innisfield.

“Have I ever wanted things that I couldn’t have, ma’am?” echoed Nellie. “Why, yes’m, I suppose I have. But folks don’t often get what they want in this ’ere world, I’ve always heard tell; an’ I guess it’s true enough.” The girl’s tone was unhappy, and she winked fast as if to keep back the insurgent tears.

“That’s what I’ve always supposed, too,” said Miss Cynthia meditatively. “But suppose there was a very simple reason why we don’t get what we want. And suppose I—we—should find out what the reason was all of a sudden?” The girl looked respectfully inquiring.

“Suppose it should be because,”—pursued her mistress, with a frightened joy shining palely in her face,—“just because we won’t believe that God is kind and generous and *wants* us to have things. Just think of that, Nellie! how different it would make everything in the whole world if we only *knew* it was true—if instead of being stern and harsh and often angry because we want foolish things. He was *really*

kind, and wanted us to have what we want—everything nice and pleasant and cheerful and pretty! Oh, I wish I was *sure* of it! I wish I'd found out about it before! I'm afraid it's too late now."

The girl expressed extreme astonishment, not unmingled with dismay in her round, solemn eyes and uplifted hands. "Aren't you feeling well, ma'am?" she asked respectfully. "Perhaps I'd better get the camphor." In Nellie's brief experience too much "religion" *au naturel* was a decidedly unhealthy symptom.

"I *do* feel well," declared Miss Cynthia stoutly. "I feel better than I ever did in my life. I *want* to be well, Nellie. Do you hear? And if God wants me to be well, too, why shouldn't I be well? And it wouldn't make a bit of difference what anybody else thought, or said; would it?"

The girl regarded her mistress' agitated little face with a suspicious interest. She had been warned by numbers of well-intentioned persons that Miss Cynthia was "growing awful queer." Heretofore, her "queerness" had been of a sort entirely intelligible to Nellie. But all this "religious business," as the girl

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termed it to herself, was an alarming indication of intellectual decay.

"I haven't seen William Cartright about the place lately," pursued Miss Cynthia unexpectedly. "Is he out of town?"

The girl started, blushed violently, then her voice broke in an uncontrollable little sob. "He—he doesn't come to—to see me any more," she faltered.

"Why not?"

"I—don't know, ma'am, exactly. Him an' me had some words one night a spell back. An' I suppose he's mad about somethin'. I guess I c'n stan' it if he can," she added defiantly. "He ain't the only pebble on the beach!"

Miss Cynthia gazed abstractedly into the depths of her tea-cup. "You'd better try wanting him, Nellie," she said gently. "It wouldn't do any harm to *try*. I think he will come back, if you do." Her voice grew stronger and more determined. "I *believe* he will come back, if you do."

XIII

MISS CYNTHIA'S fat, worn little Bible had lain unopened upon her bedroom table for two whole days, and for a like period Miss Cynthia had entirely omitted to mention the state of her soul or the pressing needs of heathen nations before the Breyfogle conception of deity. The vision of the great unwinking, watchful Eye—which she had found herself unable to supplant with the idea of the Encircling Good—had by now assumed a threatening expression, difficult to support at the stated seasons for devotion. Try as she would to dismiss the unpleasant conviction, she felt that the owner of the large, attentive ear was perfectly aware of the unseemly haste of her toilet, conducted in the accusing presence of the unread book.

On the third morning, having pricked her fingers on divers pins, torn her petticoat and broken a boot-lace—all of which the Eye appeared to note with

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a species of malicious enjoyment—she ran downstairs like a hunted thing, and out into the tranquil glories of the June morning. Great white clouds like islands of snow floated in the intense blue of the sky; the trees, vividly green against the blue, swayed softly in the warm wind; a thousand odours of sweet, lush grass, of ripening fruits and opening blossoms breathed spirit-like in its subtle presence.

“Oh, I want to live—to *live!*” she prayed passionately, and knew not that she had prayed.

Someone was passing along the elm-shaded street, a tall, athletic young figure in blue jeans. Miss Cynthia darted forward with a little eager cry.

“Wait a minute,” she called; “I want to speak with you.” She met William Cartwright’s surprised, inquiring gaze with an abashed sinking of her blue eyes. “Could you—could you spare me a few minutes—that is, if you are not in a great hurry? I haven’t seen you here lately. I was wondering——”

The young workman scowled perplexedly. “If you have any fault to find with the work,” he said stiffly, “you will please speak to Blossom, ma’am. I worked under him, you understan’.”

“Oh, no,—no indeed! I’ve no fault to find with the work.” Miss Cynthia determinedly suppressed her growing embarrassment. “It was—something quite different. It was this. Why have you quarrelled with Nellie? She is very unhappy——”

The coldly inquiring expression in the eyes of the man deepened into anger as she spoke. Miss Cynthia winced under his steady, resentful stare.

“I can see,” he began with bitter politeness, “that she has asked you, ma’am, to interfere. But I guess I’d best tell you first off that it won’t do any good. I’ll not be takin’ up with the likes of her again. Maw always told me I was pickin’ a wife beneath me, an’ I knew well enough I was, all along. But I wouldn’t ha’ cared, if——” His voice choked a little, but he went on with dogged determination, “if she’d ha’ been all I thought she was. I’ve found she ain’t; an’ that ends it.”

“Nellie didn’t ask me to interfere,” Miss Cynthia said, gripping her little courage with both hands. “It is I who am interfering. I want Nellie to be happy. Could you—tell me why you’re—angry? Perhaps it’s all a mistake. There are so many mis-

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takes, you know, and they make people just as unhappy as—as if they were true. I—I made a mistake once, and I've always been sorry."

The young fellow's defiant eyes glistened wetly. "I'm afraid it's no mistake about Nellie," he said in a low, shaken voice. "She—she—— They say she isn't—Good Lord! I can't talk about it? Why did you ask me? I guess you think I'm made of stone! Why, I've loved that girl since I was a kid in knee-pants, an' we was both in district school together. She was just like a little pink posy in them days."

"And you heard a mean thing about her and—*believed it?*" Miss Cynthia's eyes flashed blighting scorn. "Oh, you make me angry—yes, *angry!*"

William Cartright stared in a sort of fearful admiration at the little figure breathing fine contempt and indignation in every tremulous line. "Jiminy crickets!" he breathed sincerely.

"Who said such a thing about Nellie?" demanded his self-elected Nemesis sternly.

"Why, I—I do' know as I can say, exactly, ma'am. It was maw, in the first place. She said Mis' Peter-

son told her she guessed Nellie was a pretty triffin', ornery piece. She said she got it straight from Deacon Scrimger that Nellie wasn't no better than she'd ought to be."

"I'd like to know who is," murmured Miss Cynthia, ignoring the sinister meaning of the familiar phrase.

"What do you mean, ma'am?"

"Are *you* better than you ought to be? Are you even as good as you ought to be?"

"Well, if you put it that way, maybe not. But when a man like Deacon Scrimger——"

"Stop!" ordered Miss Cynthia imperiously. "I know what I shall do. You may go now. But I want you to stop here and see me to-night as you go home from work. Will you?"

The young fellow shook his head obstinately. "The' ain't any use in talkin' 'bout it; I've made up my mind to give her up," he said sulkily. "It wasn't easy, I c'n tell you, but I've gone an' done it now, an' I ain't a-goin' to——"

"*That* doesn't make any difference," Miss Cynthia told him disdainfully. "I'm not at all sure that

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Nellie would ever look at you again after the way you've treated her. Really, I don't think she would. But I shall not allow people to tell hateful lies about her to *me*."

An hour later, Deacon Scrimger, piously chanting a stanza of a well-known revival hymn to the rasping accompaniment of his plane and saw, beheld Miss Day standing in the door of his shop.

"Well, well, well!" he exclaimed briskly. "How-de-do, Cynthia! Nice mornin'! Walk right in! Glad to see ye! What kin I do fer ye this mornin'?"

Miss Cynthia's light-blue gingham skirts swept the yellow shavings crisply as she advanced to a position near the carpenter's bench. Her head was held at an uncompromising altitude and she was wearing the Breyfogle expression. "I came to find out why you said Nellie Ryan was no better than she should be," she began, without apology or preamble.

The old man's jaw fell. He stared in a sort of dull amazement at the cold-eyed, determined little figure. "I—I d'clare I don't know what on airth you're drivin' at," he began. "I ain't never said nothin' 'bout nobody to hurt." He paused to give vent to a

fit of senile coughing; then a malicious gleam twinkled in his wintry old eye.

"The gal's a good-fer-nothin' little piece, an' the' ain't no denyin' o' that," he went on. "She ain't no better 'an she'd ought to be; I know she ain't. 'F I said anythin' like that—an', mind you, I don't remember 'at I said it—but if I did, I ain't a-goin' to swallow m' words fer you ner nobody. I wonder you'll hev the critter in the house. The way she up an' sassed *me*—an elder in the church!"

"Nellie told me what she said to you the day I gave my furniture away," said Miss Cynthia. "I think—I should have said something of the sort myself, if—— But I didn't come to talk to you about that. I only wanted to say that you must go to every person that you've talked to about Nellie, and take back what you have said. Especially to Mrs. Cart-right."

Deacon Scrimger whirled about and picked up his saw. "This is my busy day," he quoted suggestively. "I ain't got no time to fool away."

"You'd better listen to what I say," said Miss Cynthia distinctly. "At noon to-day, if you haven't

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done it I shall put the matter into the hands of Jabez Tilman. I think he'll find there's damages to collect. I shall tell him to collect them—all, every cent."

The old man bristled like a dangerous animal. "Who air you to come here a-threatenin' me—right here on m' own premises?" he snarled. "I'll hev ye to know 'at I'll git the law on ye fer—fer—— Oh, I'll git the law on ye fer somethin', see 'f I don't!"

"You'd much better do as I say," advised Miss Cynthia inexorably. "You can tell them you were joking. You won't mind putting it that way, I dare say."

"Well, I wa'n't, so to say, reel serious. But I can tell ye one thing. I ain't a mite o' use fer sassy females; never did hev, an' ain't now." The deacon paused to glare malevolently at Miss Cynthia. "Females sh'd be kep' under subjection—under rule, an' if they ain't got no male pertecter to boss 'em, they ain't no airthly use to nobody! Th' 'Postle Paul says 'let yer women-folks keep shet'; an' they'd ought to—all the endurin' while. Well, I s'pose I'll hev to let on 'at I was funnin' 'bout that blamed——"

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"You'll have to make it perfectly clear and plain that you didn't mean a word you said about Nellie Ryan," Miss Cynthia told him positively. "I shall call on Mrs. Peterson and Mrs. Cartright this afternoon. They will tell me what you said."

With this, Miss Cynthia, still wearing the uncompromising expression of countenance peculiar to her Revolutionary ancestors, turned and marched out of the shop.

The deacon wagged his head threateningly after her retreating figure. "She'll git the law on me, will she?" he cackled, rubbing his dry old hands. "A female woman 'll git the law on *me*! Huh!" He snatched up his plane and pounced agilely upon his interrupted work, the while his cracked voice was again uplifted in pious song:

"Re-vive us a-gin!

Fill each heart with thy love!

May each soul be re-kin-dulled

With fire f'om a-bove!"

Miss Cynthia, halfway down the street, paused to listen. "Sometimes," she murmured, with a deepen-

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ing of the Breyfogle expression, "I feel *almost*—like being an—*infidel*!"

While Miss Cynthia was thus triumphantly following the trail of the small but spiteful lie which had wrecked Nellie Ryan's peace, that unfortunate young person was undergoing divers peculiar trials of her own. Miss Cynthia had conscientiously endeavoured to induct Nellie into various frugal practices, calculated to increase the material comfort of a humble home, among which was the "trying out" of "drippings."

Quite naturally and inevitably Nellie turned up her pretty nose at Miss Cynthia's housewifely customs. But she docilely endured them, while resolving to do as she wastefully pleased in her own small kitchen.

The memory of this futile resolution lent peculiar poignancy to the operation of "trying out" on this particular morning, and her eyes, blurred with unshed tears, caused her to splash the smoking fat on her round, white arms as she poured it into a small brown jar of ancient Breyfogle date. The girl gave an angry little shriek and dropped the fat-kettle, which

in its turn smashed the brown jar. Whereupon, the "drippings," in simple obedience to the law of gravitation, proceeded to drip—all over the well-scoured table, and down in deliberate oily little streams to the floor.

Miss Cynthia had earnestly assured Nellie that "drippings" would go a great way in a house. The girl, observing this practical demonstration, was now sure of it.

"I don't care!" she cried, the vexed tears following the example of the drippings. "I don't care one bit, so there!"

She sank down in a chair and apathetically watched the slow meanderings of the cooling fat. She had reached the point where misery becomes an absolute luxury. "I suppose I sh'll always be drudgin' about in somebody else's kitchen, just like this," she moaned, and rocked herself back and forth, nursing her burned arms. "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What shall I do!"

This piteous plaint was answered in unexpected fashion from the back door which stood open onto the sunny porch.

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“*Well! I want-ta-know!*” exclaimed a voice. The tentative inquiry was completed by a cogent, comprehensive sniff which appeared to arrest the attention of even the wandering drippings.

Nellie Ryan looked up, her blue eyes still smarting with half-shed tears. “No. We don’t want to buy anythin’ this mornin’,” she said tartly. “Miss Day ain’t to home.”

The tall figure in the rusty alpaca dress and beaded cape bore a large green pasteboard box firmly tied with brown string, a circumstance which had suggested the girl’s words of dismissal.

“I sh’d *hope* so!” commented the visitor, with dynamic emphasis. “I sh’d cert’nly hope she ain’t r’sponsible fer what I’m a-lookin’ at in this here kitchen!”

The purple roses above the rim of the dusty black hat vibrated with unspeakable emotion as their wearer surveyed in turn the disordered cupboard; the sink, brimming with half-washed dishes; the grease-be-spattered table; the floor with its wandering rivulets of hardening grease.

“I didn’t ask you to come in here as I know of!”

snapped Nellie Ryan, gathering up the fragments of the brown jar and tossing them into the coal-hod with a careless crash. "I've got to clean up this nasty grease—bad luck to it! I've burnt me arm somethin' fierce! I guess I'll have to ask you to tell your business an' go on. The' ain't no room in this kitchen fer two."

"You ain't never spoke a truer word 'an that, an' you never will ef you live to be a hunderd," the lady with the purple roses enunciated deliberately. She had set her green pasteboard box down on the floor with a decisive thump, and unfastened the beaded cape at her gaunt throat. "I s'pose you know who I be," she continued, her eyes completing another searching tour of the kitchen. "My! It 'll take me a week of stiddy work to git things to rights agin."

Nellie Ryan was down on her knees scraping up the floor. Her pretty face was flushed, the tendrils of her reddish hair curled about her white forehead like little flames. "I don't know who you be, an' what's more I don't care!" she said tartly. "I wouldn't put up with Queen Victory a-loiterin' 'round my kitchen to-day, let alone a trampin' pedler!"

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“*Imperdunce!*” intoned the lady in black, with an upward glance of almost religious fervour. “*My kitchen! Did you ever! My—kitchen! I’m Abby Whiton!*” she finished majestically.

“I suspicioned as much,” said Nellie coolly.

“An’ I’ll let you know ’at I’ve come back to *my place to stay!*” Miss Whiton continued, with a fine disregard of the girl’s scornful blue eyes. “If ever I turned my back on my plain dooty, I done it the day I left this ’ere kitchen. You’ve prob’ly done yer best—I c’n see with half an eye ’at ye’r young an’ foolish. But you might as well pick up yer traps an’ go now. I’ll take a-holt here right off; the’ ain’t a minute to lose, I s’d say.”

“Well, I *never!*” exclaimed Nellie Ryan. She had hastily prepared a mixture of soda and boiling water and was about to pour it upon the greasy floor, when Abby Whiton’s compelling hand gripped her arm.

“Don’t ye know no better ’an to pour hot water on that fat, ye little idjit? It ’ll drive it int’ the grain o’ the wood so ’t you’ll never git it out t’ yer dyin’ day! Where’s the starch-box? You want to put

starch on it first off to draw the grease. 'An' my goodness! I see you ain't put yer bread in yit. 'Taint fit to eat, anyhow; I c'n see that! I guess Miss Cynthia 'll be mighty glad to git some o' my good victuals agin after your messy ways of doin' things!"

Nellie's Irish temper flamed out of bounds at this last insult. "I want you should clear out of this kitchen, right now!" she cried. "This is my place, an' I'm hired to stay till fall, an' what's more I'm a-goin' to do it fer all of you or anybody! So there! I know all 'bout your wonderful cookin'. Miss Day like to ha' died eatin' it. She likes my bread an' my cake an' my pies an' the way I broil my meats an' everythin' I do. She's said so more'n a hundred times. She said she'd never eat a real tasty, relishin' meal of victuals till I come here. So there!"

Abby Whiton sank down in her chair, a curious dusky pallour stealing over her gaunt old face. "Did—did Miss Cynthia say that?" she faltered. "I thought—I thought mebbe she was a-missin' me like I'd missed her. I—I got so I reelly couldn't stan' it. Night an' day I was a-frettin' an'

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a-worryin' 'bout her. 'An' now you say she didn't relish my victuals."

"Of course she didn't," asseverated Nellie, with cruel satisfaction in her enemy's manifest distress. "Why, anybody could tell that by just lookin' at her. She's been growin' fat sence I come."

"*Fat!*—Miss Cynthia—growin' *fat!*"

"Yes, an' she's took off her black clo'es, an' she's got heaps an' heaps of lovely dresses up in her closet, an' the house is all fixed up as han'some as a picture—an' every bit happened sence I come!"

"She didn't know where I was goin'" continued Abby Whiton in a dreary monotone. "I didn't git a chanct to see her when we come to part. An' thinks s' I she'd prob'ly like to git me back—fer I don't see,"—her eyes wandered dully about the disordered kitchen,—“I don't see how she c'n git along without me—after thirty years, an' me a-lovin' her—a-lovin' her like——”

The dry old voice broke into unmistakable sobs. The gaunt shoulders heaved dreadfully under the rusty cape with its arabesques of glittering black beads.

Nellie Ryan's scornful eyes melted into surprised

alarm, then into quick girlish compassion. "Why, don't cry!" she begged, "I guess Miss Day——"

She stopped short, with a little embarrassed laugh, for her mistress had opened the door, and stood looking quietly at the scene.

Abby Whiton shook herself vigorously free from the girl's light, pitying touch. "I 'xpect you'll think I'm a reg'lar old fool!" she exclaimed, with an effort after one of her decisive sniffs which ended disastrously in a choking sob. "But I've walked more'n fifteen miles this mornin' to git here, an' when it come over me all of a suddent 'at Miss Cynthy didn't—want—me—no more, w'y I kind of——"

"Abby!" It was Miss Cynthia's voice, and it was a curious blend of tears and laughter.

The woman sprang to her feet, stared for one brief, bewildered minute at the slender little figure in its dainty summer gown. "Oh, Miss Cynthy!" she cried. All the faithful love of thirty toilsome years, the homesick longing of thirty lonely days vibrated in the harsh old voice. Then Abby Whiton stiffened herself inexorably. "*She* says you didn't relish my cookin'."

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Miss Cynthia put her arms about the unresponsive figure. "I'm so glad to see you, Abby!" she said softly. Then—she kissed Abby Whiton full on her wrinkled cheek. "I never knew before that you—loved me," she whispered.

XIV

THE Puffer twins stood in their mother's presence with a serious, almost solemn expression on their round, freckled faces.

"I shan't be gone a minute longer than I'm 'bliged to be," Mrs. Puffer was saying, as she hastily tied her bonnet-strings and smoothed out the somewhat wrinkled skirt of her best summer dress. She was a sufficiently comely figure of a woman, and despite the fact that most of her gowns bore unmistakable evidence of her chief occupation in the shape of dampish spots in the front of the skirt and a generally relaxed appearance of the bodice, her children enthusiastically regarded her as not only the wisest, but the most beautiful person in the world.

"I've fed him up good," continued Mrs. Puffer briskly, "and he won't be hungry for at least two hours. Now, if you'll just roll him slowly up and down the sidewalk in his carriage, an' don't get him

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all waked up an' fidgety playing with him, he'll prob'ly drop right off to sleep an' stay asleep till I come home. He's the best baby that ever lived—so he was!"

Mrs. Puffer bestowed a parting cuddle and pat on her youngest as she tucked him, all milky and complacent, into the nest of pillows in his perambulator.

"I'm goin' to wheel him, 'cause I'm the oldest," announced Edwina importantly.

"You're only five minutes older 'an me, Ed Puffer, an' I'm a lot taller," retorted Harriet indignantly. "I shall wheel him. Mayn't I, ma?"

"You may wheel him up the street as far as the corner; then Edwina can wheel him back," said Mrs. Puffer, hunting absent-mindedly for her gloves, which she seldom had use for.

"I shall turn the carriage 'round, anyway; it's awful hard to turn the carriage 'round; but I know how," said Harriet firmly.

"We'll both of us turn it 'round," amended Edwina, with equal firmness. "I'll take hold of the front when you're wheeling, an' you c'n take hold of the back;

then I'll take hold of the back when I'm wheeling, an' you c'n——"

Mrs. Puffer, looking worried and anxious, interrupted this careful plan of the coming campaign to warn the children of the danger of tipping the carriage over into the gutter. "I shan't be easy a single minute while I'm gone," she said plaintively. "If it wasn't that my teeth are keeping me awake nights with aching I shouldn't think of going. Dear me! if you *should* get to quarrelling over the carriage——"

"We'll be careful, ma!" repeated the twins in dutiful chorus. "We won't quarrel. We'll take awful good care of the baby. We'll both of us wheel him, an' both of us turn him 'round."

Mrs. Puffer hurried away down the street, after seeing the twins started at a snail's pace for the corner, their four moist pink hands firmly grasping the handle of the perambulator.

The baby was apparently sound asleep by the time the corner was reached. Edwina peeped under the canopy and announced the fact with maternal pride. They turned the carriage around without accident and paced solemnly back to their starting point.

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"It's lots of fun, don't you think so, Ed?" asked Harriet at the end of the third round.

"Uh-huh," assented Edwina doubtfully. "It feels kind of funny to walk so slow, though. I wonder if it would wake him up if we played fire-engine, *real careful*."

The baby made no sign when the carriage began to move more rapidly. The twins were now trotting at a good rate of speed, their stout little shoes clattering briskly on the stone sidewalk.

"Sometimes fire-horses gallop," suggested Harriet. "I'll gallop the carriage, an' you be the fire chief an' run awful fast in front."

This suggestion was adopted with exhilarating results. The baby slept soundly, despite the jerky motion imparted to his vehicle by the galloping steed behind.

"Once a fire engine ran into a fence," said Edwina solemnly, as they drew up panting and breathless after ten minutes of this strenuous exercise. "You pretty near did, too."

"Oh, well, 's long 's I didn't, what's the use in talkin' about it," rejoined Harriet carelessly. "Anyway, I

guess we'd better change to a fun'ral till we get rested. I'll run the hearse an' you be the mourners comin' along behind."

This proved restful, but not exciting. "Now let's play we're a milk-wagon," suggested Edwina. "I'll be the milkman, an' you be the milkman's horse. We'll stop at every house an' you c'n stamp your feet as if the flies was bitin', an' I'll yell 'whoa' like Mr. Potts does, while I p'tend to carry in the milk."

This proceeding was made strikingly realistic by Harriet's later idea, which involved a removal of the baby's socks to use for pint measures.

"I'm 'fraid he'll take cold with his b'essed little pink tootsy-wootsies all bare," objected Edwina, with a fine imitation of her mother's tone and manner.

"No, he won't, either," contradicted Harriet as she pulled off the socks. "I'll cuddle 'em up—so—in his pinning-blanket. He's all hot an' sticky anyway. If he was my baby I'd let him cool off."

"He isn't your baby."

"Yes, he is, too. He's my brother, an' he's a baby, so 'course he's my baby. I'm goin' to take off this hot old blanket this minute an' make him comf'table."

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"He's my brother jus' 's much as he is yours, an' I say he's got to have that blanket on. I guess ma knows how to fix him."

"Lots an' lots of times she takes off his blankets; she says 'b'ess his little heart, he's too warm, so him was!' You know she does, Ed Puffer. Now I'll tell what we'll do. I'll p'tend I'm the mother, an' you c'n p'tend you're the father—all the rest of the afternoon, an' then you'll have to do jus' 's I say."

"I don't want to be the father, 't isn't any fun," said Edwina, sulkily kicking the wheel of the carriage. "I'll tell you what I'll p'tend; I'll p'tend I'm the gran'ma, an' I sh'll say, 'I'm *s'prised* at you, daughter, for takin' off that blanket in this wind. I sh'll put it right back,' an' don't you say a word till I'm gone home—ma never does, when Gran'ma Puffer says things like that."

"All right; but when you goin' home?"

"I ain't goin' at all. I'm goin' to make my home with you, same 's Susie Winter's gran'ma does," said Edwina sweetly.

"I shan't play mother an' gran'ma 'nother single minute," declared Harriet crossly, after Edwina had

rigorously enforced her old-fashioned ideas of baby-tending to the extent of putting on the socks again. "You've gone and waked him up now, an' you'll just see 'at he'll cry in about five minutes."

"No, he won't, b'ess him!" giggled Edwina. "Just look at him laugh, Harry; ain't he too cunnin'?"

The Puffer baby's blue eyes were very wide open by this time, his pink fists struggled powerfully with his blankets, while his small, indeterminate features writhed and reddened ominously.

"Let's wheel him fast!" ordered Harriet, with an apprehension born of experience. "There! What did I tell you?"

The baby was growing suspicious and indignant, as his wrathful roars plainly indicated. "Jounce him, Ed,—jounce him hard in front, an' pound his rattle-box on the edge of the carriage; I'll run awful fast!"

A slight cessation of the infantile disapproval evidenced the infantile surprise, but the slow process of turning around intervened, with disastrous results. Harriet's red lips set themselves in firm lines. "Are your hands clean, Ed?" she demanded resourcefully.

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"Pretty clean, I guess."

"Put your finger in his mouth, then; maybe that 'll stop him."

But it didn't. The situation was growing serious. "If I could lift him out," murmured Harriet doubtfully, "maybe he'd stop."

"Don't you das'!" cried Edwina.

"Do you das' me, Ed Puffer?"

"No, I don't das' you; I shouldn't das' to das' you, 'cause you'd do it right off. But you *mustn't!*"

"Who said so? Ma didn't say I mustn't take him out."

"She meant it; you know she did."

"She thought he wouldn't cry, an' he's cryin'."

There was no denying this poignant fact. The two little girls sang, jounced, coaxed, patted, and pleaded in vain. The Puffer baby had mistaken the period of his nap for a much longer one. He had apparently quite forgotten his late milky and complacent condition.

"Poor little sing, he finks he's hungry," said Edwina pityingly.

"An' it's just exactly as bad for us as if he really

was," agreed Harriet gloomily. "He's getting purple in the face, now."

Edwina burst into discouraged tears. "I wish ma would come," she wailed. "I'm awful scared when he yells like that."

"I'm not scared," said Harriet stoutly, "but he's makin' such a ter'ble noise that we've *gotta* do some-thin'." They had reached the corner of maternal designation once more, and instead of turning around she pushed the carriage determinedly into the next street.

"Where you goin'?" demanded Edwina, with wide eyes; "ma said——"

"I'm goin' to take him to Miss Cynthy's house," said Harriet doggedly. "She likes dolls most as much as we do, an' I guess she'll like babies, too. Anyway, I'm goin'."

Miss Cynthia was sitting in the shade of the roses on her front piazza. She was dressed in a crisp, lace-trimmed muslin gown, and one of the newest magazines lay open in her lap. She was experiencing the exhilarating satisfaction peculiar to one who has adventured herself on a perilous enterprise and won out.

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Nellie Ryan was again her smiling self, and the repentant William, after a suitable period devoted to the consumption of humble-pie, was frequenting the back porch of the Breyfogle mansion as before.

Abby Whiton watched them there of an evening with grim amusement. "No wonder her victuals air tasty," she had commented; "they'd ought to be; 'f you could see the butter she dashes in. But if you c'n stan' it I s'pose I kin. I'll bet I'll beat her at her own game before fall. She ain't willin' to whirl in an' work the way I be. My las' sponge-cake beat hers all holler. Anyway, it's lucky I come jus' as I did; her min' 's so took up with sparkin' she ain't good fer much; she fergot to rense the dishes las' night. I tell her she wants to keep a tight rein over that young man of hern, an' not be too awful mushy an' lovin'."

Miss Cynthia was dreamily comparing the facts of this humble romance of real life with the highly coloured love-story in the magazine when the gate clicked and a baby-carriage apparently propelled by unseen hands bumped noisily in upon the freshly raked gravel. The occupant of the carriage had evidently

reached the point when the feelings become unutterable, for his strident roars were frequently interrupted by ominous pauses.

"You'd better take him out, quick!" advised Harriet Puffer with a dramatic gesture of despair. "He's pretty near choked with cryin', I guess."

"Yes, do *please* take him out!" wailed Edwina. "He's got all mixed up in his clo'es, an' I can't unmix him; the more I try the worse he gets."

"Where is your mother?" asked Miss Cynthia, peeping in at the wrathful infant with an air of eager curiosity.

"She's gone to the dentist's," explained Harriet. "She said he wouldn't wake up, an' I don't b'lieve he would 've 'f Ed hadn't kep' a-coverin' him up every time I uncovered him. She was the gran'ma an' I was the mother."

Miss Cynthia timidly laid hold upon the writhing mass of flannels and extricated it from the carriage. The roars suddenly ceased.

"I guess he thinks your ma," observed Edwina intelligently.

"Then he'll yell again in a minute when he finds out

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you ain't," opined Harriet darkly. "He knows an awful lot for three months old."

Miss Cynthia was untangling the small, fat body from its encircling blankets. Her face was flushed; her blue eyes shone; she breathed quickly. "I always wanted to take care of a baby when I was a little girl," she said.

"You c'n have him all the rest of the afternoon just as well as not," said Harriet generously. "We don't care, do we, Ed? Let's us go an' play tag while she takes care of him."

"Would you like to take care of him?" inquired Edwina, with anxious politeness. "You c'n p'tend he's your truly baby, if you want to."

"Go and play tag, if you like," Miss Cynthia told them hastily. She was cuddling the small, warm body in her thin arms, and the baby was blindly nosing her soft neck with little whimpering cries.

"He isn't a bit hungry," called Harriet over her shoulder, as she ran joyously away. "I guess you c'n get him to sleep bimeby."

Left to herself, Miss Cynthia stared at her treasure-trove with wide blue eyes. "Oh, you little duck,

you!" she murmured delightedly, as she felt his round arms through the thin muslin of his dress. The tiny fluttering hands with a row of dimples across the back next claimed her attention. Then with shame-faced blushes she explored his flannel skirts in search of two active pink feet. The mottled rose of his cheeks, the fuzz of downy hair in his fat neck, the queer, uncertain blue of his eyes—she examined them all with charmed incredulity. Never before had she had undisputed possession of a baby. It would probably never happen again. She drew the blankets awkwardly about the soft little body and began to sway gently back and forth in her chair, as she remembered to have seen mothers do. After a while she even ventured to pat the little back with light, caressing strokes.

The green, shaded yard was very still. The sunshine sifted down through the tall elms with an occasional drowsy note from a nesting phœbe bird. Miss Cynthia glanced down at the baby held close against her breast; his eyes were closed, a faint smile fluttered about his moist, pink mouth.

"Just suppose—" whispered Miss Cynthia to herself.

XV

THE long, sweetly monotonous procession of summer days were all folded softly into the past, and Miss Cynthia, with a little shock of painful surprise, faced autumn. It had been the pleasantest summer she ever remembered, despite the hidden current of fear which murmured hollowly beneath the shallow crust of everyday living. There had been teas and picnics and occasional drives behind George Blossom's big brown horse, and the old house had echoed as never before to the sound of young feet and young voices. More than once, after the auspicious occasion of his first visit, did Miss Cynthia cuddle and pet the Puffer baby in motherful fashion, and the twins had established a permanent playhouse under the apple tree in the back yard.

Mrs. Pettibone had fallen into the pleasant habit of bringing the minister's socks over onto Miss Cynthia's piazza to mend, and the two women talked freely of things seen and unseen in a way which might

have scandalised the orthodox pastor could he have heard it. Still Miss Cynthia had not told the minister's wife her terrible little secret. She had told no one. Some fine instinct of life had laid the finger of silence upon her lips.

On a certain chill morning in late September, when the rain fell against the window panes with a hint of approaching winter in its cold, slanting drizzle, she opened her Bible to the ninety-first Psalm, and found a tremulous comfort. Henceforth, she longed feverishly to find "the secret place" of safety, and knew not that it was already "nearer than breathing."

By the time the last leaf had fallen she had gotten into the way of taking long, solitary walks which led her out and away from the prying eyes behind the village windows. Her own confused and struggling thoughts were uneasy companions; yet it was something gained to be able to endure them in solitude. Miss Cynthia was no longer afraid of her own thinking, and out from the hidden under-current of fear a strong, brave hope lifted itself now and again. She was wrestling, albeit weakly, with the angel of deliverance; but as yet she had caught no glimpse of

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his veiled face. And the sentient body of her changed subtly with the changing life, as it must, always and inevitably.

Malvina Bennett, proud and busy with fashioning new gowns of many colours for Miss Cynthia, declared she could scarcely believe her eyes. "Every one of your measures is changed f'om last spring," announced the little dressmaker importantly. "'Taint as 'o you'd reely fleshed up,—though I guess you hev gained some; but it's a kind of a general diff'runce. I never see nothin' like it in all my 'xperience a-sewin'."

Miss Bennett had not frequently been called upon to fit garments upon a growing soul; but she dimly groped after the astonishing fact as she fashioned a gown of glowing oak-leaf red, fur-bordered against the cold, which Miss Cynthia had chosen for one of her winter gowns. "A year ago," said Miss Bennett meditatively, "I sh'd 'a' thought you was actually a-takin' leave of your senses to git a dress like this; but now"—she paused to survey the faintly smiling face which was bent toward her—"now it somehow seems to be jest the thing."

Miss Cynthia, wearing the gown of oak-leaf red, and seeming in it an integral part of the clear, frosty October day, was walking briskly on an upland road, when history repeated itself, as it is wont to do. The intermittent creak and rattle of wagon wheels reached her from beyond the crest of the hill. Later an inquisitive collie dashed forward to sniff at her daintily gathered skirts; then George Blossom, perched on the high seat of his wagon, drew up his clumsy-footed horse at sight of the little figure at the road-side. His gloomy face brightened as he jumped down over the muddy wheel.

“Nice day for a walk, isn’t it, Miss Day?” he began. “What do you say to riding home with me, if you’re tired?” Then he burst into a short laugh. “Do you remember how I met you hereabouts last spring? Gracious! it seems more like years than months to me.”

“It does seem a long while,” agreed Miss Cynthia. She paled a little as she met the young man’s honest gray eyes. “It really isn’t very long, though—only half a year.”

“A lot can happen in half a year,” he said, scowling

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discontentedly. "A fellow can learn that he's a big fool for his pains, for one thing. I've just contracted to paint three barns for Mr. James Scott," he went on, with a deepening of the wrinkle between his young eyes. "I'm such a conscientious workman that folks value my services highly—when it comes to painting a barn red."

Miss Cynthia listened with entire understanding. "I wonder," she said thoughtfully, "if you would care to borrow the money from me to go away for a year of study. I have—a—a sum, which I ought to invest. It is, in fact, lying idle. I should be glad to——"

"Should you?" cried George Blossom. His face had become suddenly illuminated. "Oh, I do want to go away. I *want*——" He stopped short and turned roughly to the brown horse, who was manifesting certain crude signs of animal impatience with the vagaries of his master.

"You'd better start at once, I should say," Miss Cynthia went on, in a matter-of-fact tone. "If you will decide just what course you would like to take up, and——"

"I know exactly what I want to do," said the young fellow under his breath. "But——" His face reddened slowly. "I can't give you any sort of security. I just couldn't ask father to—to mortgage the farm. They have worked so hard, and——"

"You will give me your personal note, of course," Miss Cynthia said promptly. "It is quite customary, you know, and I shall consider it ample security."

"I don't know much about that sort of business," he confessed shyly. "But I know I can pay every cent of it back. I know—— Thank you," he finished abruptly. "I will do it." He drew a deep breath. "I can turn over the contract for those barns to Bill Cartright; I guess he's going to need all he c'n make."

Miss Cynthia laughed happily. "He and Nellie are to be married next week," she said. "Abby Whiton has pieced them two quilts already. She proposes to do her full duty by Nellie."

"Bill had a fool notion at one time that he was a notch above the girl!" observed George Blossom, with a faint-hearted echo of Miss Cynthia's laugh. "I told him he was an ass—just a plain ass. In a

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country place like this it's too darned silly to be always going on about position and—and '*culture*.' I've got so I hate that word '*culture*'! What's '*culture*,' I'd like to know, when it comes to——”

The young fellow set his white teeth strongly; his eyes glowed with love and fury. “I suppose you think I'm a regular chump,” he said roughly. “*She* does, anyhow; she as much as told me so this afternoon. Well, maybe I'll find I c'n afford to forget her.”

Miss Cynthia watched him with a sigh as he rattled away down the long slope, behind the pounding feet of the clumsy brown horse. “He will forget,” she murmured; “but she will remember.”

She rested for a while beside the gray stone wall, her richly coloured gown making a gorgeous splash of colour, in deep accord with the browns and russets of the sober landscape. It was very still on the lonely hill-top; all the chirping and singing of summer had ceased; three or four silent crows wheeled sombrely athwart the cold blue of the sky; the yellow leaves dropped noiselessly one by one, from the wide-branched butternuts that fringed the road.

Miss Cynthia had fallen into a reverie so absorbed and engrossing that she did not hear the light foot-falls of the girl who was coming down the road, a scarlet tam poised jauntily on her dark, curling hair, her trim figure alert and self-conscious in its tightly-fitting jacket.

She paused to greet Miss Cynthia with a little cry of surprise and pleasure. The two had established a friendship of a tentative, unsubstantial nature since the day when Rosalie Scott discovered the neglected Breyfogle mahogany in Miss Cynthia's attic. On her part the girl had never ceased to derive a girlishly arrogant amusement from her contemplation of Miss Cynthia's elderly fads, as she chose to term them. This attitude, while it put the older woman slightly on the defensive, was not wholly without its reflection in Miss Cynthia's mind. She was not, as has been intimated, a very astute little person, yet she found in Rosalie Scott's disdainful attitude toward the community at large and herself in particular, matter for a kindly pity and regret which would have thoroughly amazed the young person in question could she have guessed it.

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"What a lovely dress!" began the girl, with a pretty air of envy. "Do you know you looked exactly like a spirit of autumn, with your pale, spirituelle face and still eyes when I came upon you."

She blushed with pleasure at the sound of her own words. "I have been reading Keats' 'Ode to Autumn' this afternoon," she went on, with a little self-conscious sigh. "One ought always to read it in October, I think; it is *so* exquisitely beautiful! You know it, of course."

"No," said Miss Cynthia, "I never cared much for poetry."

"You don't?" exclaimed the girl; "what a pity!"

She moved her slim shoulders ever so slightly as she continued her studiedly careless examination of Miss Cynthia's red gown. "I have always *loved* poetry. I write it myself sometimes. I simply can't help it."

"Do you?" said Miss Cynthia absent-mindedly.

"How very nice." She was thinking of the look in George Blossom's boyish eyes when he had said "Maybe I c'n afford to forget her."

She turned to look carefully at the girl's pretty face, the Breyfogle expression, with which Abby Whiton

was growing respectfully familiar, sharpening her indeterminate little mouth and childish blue eyes. "It must be very pleasant to be so 'different from ordinary folks,'" she finished deliberately.

The girl bit her lip. "I believe you're trying to snub me, too," she said sulkily. "Pa does, sometimes; and to-day that impertinent workman—I know *you* like him; but he *is* impertinent—he said horrid things to me about poetry and—and—— I can't bear him anyhow. He hasn't a particle of real culture!"

"Perhaps he'll manage to acquire more than you have, before you see him again," Miss Cynthia said cruelly. "He's going away this week to study."

"Oh, I guess you're mistaken; he's just been hired to paint father's barns. I'll be bored to death seeing him around with his horrid sticky brushes and things. I *detest* the smell of paint!" And the girl laughed, a thought too shrilly.

Miss Cynthia made no comment on this speech. She was thinking that perhaps George Blossom was right about affording to forget this girl. One could afford to forget some people and some things. It was good

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to forget—to be able to laugh at vague, haunting memories. Her blue eyes shone suddenly keen and cold as the autumn sky, athwart which the sombre crows were flapping heavily.

“I can assure you that you will not be bothered with seeing George Blossom around any more,” she said briskly. “I talked with him myself this afternoon, and he has decided to go away at once. He may never come back here to stay. I think the chances are that he will not. There are other places which will give him a better start in life than Innisfield. I shall certainly advise him—not to return.”

She stopped short to observe the sudden eclipse which had fallen on Rosalie’s rich beauty. The girl’s warm colour had gradually receded, leaving her pallid and pinched-looking. Her hands moved aimlessly at her side; her great dark eyes fixed themselves with a frightened, appealing look upon Miss Cynthia’s face.

“I know you don’t like me,” she faltered at last. “You think I’m heartless and horrid, and that’s why you——” She threw up her delicate head with a defiant laugh, while the rich bloom flashed back into

lips and cheeks and shone in her angry eyes. "Do you suppose I *care* what he does? Do you think for a minute that I *care*?"

"You do care, child," said Miss Cynthia softly. "Oh, my dear, my dear! don't lie to your own heart. Don't, I beg of you. Listen——"

The girl had turned her head aside, with an obstinate lifting of her slim shoulders.

"Once I had a lover," Miss Cynthia went on hurriedly. "No, don't laugh at me, child; he loved me dearly. He was poorer than I, and lived in a shabby little house at the edge of the village. It wasn't altogether my fault, but I—I told him I could never marry him, that he must go away. And he did. That was all."

"What do you mean?" The girl asked stupidly.

"I mean just that. He went away. He forgot. But I didn't forget; and the years have been long and empty; and now——"

"And now?"

"And now—it is—growing late." Miss Cynthia's pale lips just formed the words. Her hand stole unconsciously to the breast of her crimson gown.

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“I’m going home,” said Rosalie Scott, after a long silence. She stooped impulsively and kissed Miss Cynthia’s pale cheek. “If you will come home with me I’ll drive you into town. You look tired.”

Miss Cynthia shook her head. “I am—not—tired,” she said. “Good-bye.”

She wanted to be alone. To have unearthed this mute, dead thing before the girl’s curious eyes was a task that she had hardly brought herself to. The reburial at least must be private. It should also be final, she told herself.

At an angle of the road, where the russet woods merged into cultivated fields, a solitary figure was standing, looking off over the village which dotted the undulating meadows on either side of the narrow, twisted river. Miss Cynthia, her short-sighted eyes misty with pain, passed the wayfarer without a glance.

The man turned sharply at the approach of the little figure in its gay gown, followed it with a speculative gleam of something like amusement in his dark eyes, and finally overtook it with a few long strides.

"You'll think I'm always turning up at odd moments, like a Jack-in-the-box," he said easily.

Miss Cynthia stared at him wordlessly. "Why have you come?" she said at last. She did not smile at him as before, and he was unreasonably hurt because she did not.

"I came to Innisfield to see you," he told her directly. "It struck me that our talk together was—well, it was unsatisfactory—to me, at least. I kept going over what you had said after I went away—I had only a few minutes to spend that day, you remember, and——"

"I had forgotten," she said vaguely. "So many things have happened since. But it was very good of you, Mr. Blake, to come and see me. I am sorry I was not at home." She was looking at him quietly and observantly, as at a stranger.

"I had almost lost sight of the old days—I believe I told you so," he went on hurriedly; "but seeing you that day somehow brought it all back. I have thought of it and of you a lot, since." His eyes, so like those of the boy she remembered, were searching her face.

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“And you found it very amusing—you laughed at it all, I hope?” Miss Cynthia hardly knew her own voice.

“No, by George! I did not,” he exclaimed impetuously. “For one thing, I remembered altogether too well the day I left Innisfield. It was in the morning at five o’clock—a cold, drizzly beast of a day, and I was just as cold and pinched and forlorn as the weather. You never guessed it, but I stood under your window and cried like a baby before I heard the stage-horn tooting and knew that I must go.”

“I’m sorry it happened so,” Miss Cynthia said drearily. “I thought I couldn’t help it, then.”

“After that,” went on the man, with a reminiscent shrug, “I determined to forget you. And I was so busy finding enough to eat that I actually succeeded after a while. It took a long time, though.”

His last words deepened the look of determination in Miss Cynthia’s face. “I think,” she said clearly, “that I should like to say two or three things; then, if you please, we’ll not talk about it any more.”

His eyes begged her to go on.

“It all happened so very long ago,” Miss Cynthia

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said, choosing her words deliberately, "that I agree with you it ought to be forgotten. But I've always wanted to tell you that I know I did wrong, and that I am ashamed and sorry. I didn't—understand—*then*, what I was doing. If you will forgive me—I shall be happier, I think. And—yes, that is all."

"You are not changed," he murmured wonderingly, "you are not changed."

"You are mistaken," said Miss Cynthia, with an air of gentle finality. "I am changed—you are changed—everything is changed. It is quite impossible to go back to the old days."

Her blue eyes were calm and untroubled; they wore the curiously far-away look which he remembered to have seen in them before.

His keen, clever face had grown grave and anxious. "I never thought I should ask a woman for her friendship," he said at last. "I've never cared much for women. Perhaps I ought to say I've never been thrown with them much, except in a professional way. My mother died ten years ago. Since then I've been too busy to go into society." He paused to smile

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doubtfully to himself. "But I should like it if you will let me be your friend—if you will be my friend. I shan't be able to see you often; but I can write—if you will allow me. Will you?"

Miss Cynthia hesitated in silence.

"I must go back to my work to-night," he went on, his eyes upon her face. "I will write to you to-morrow. My letters may not interest you, but I will do my best."

Miss Cynthia looked up, her face touched with pathetic youth and beauty in its sudden bloom of anticipation. "I think I should like to have letters," she said simply. "I have never had many; there has never been anybody to write to me. Sometimes I watch the postman of a morning and wish he would bring me a letter. But he scarcely ever does. Of course there are the papers and magazines, but they're not like letters."

"And you will write to me?"

Miss Cynthia shook her head. "Nothing happens in Innisfield," she sighed. "There is just church and prayer-meeting and the sewing-society. You would not care to hear about such things."

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"I should care to hear about anything that interests you," he said, in a low voice. "Tell me what you are thinking of, too; we'll try and get acquainted all over again, and perhaps by next summer——"

"No—*no!*" whispered Miss Cynthia, with a frightened little shiver; "*not next summer!* I shall not——"

He waited patiently for her to finish her sentence. Then he bade her a hasty good-bye at her own door and hurried away in the gathering darkness.

Miss Cynthia went in and closed the door definitely behind her. She was glad to find Abby Whiton building a fire on the sitting-room hearth. She stood close beside her without removing her hat or gloves.

"The' was a man come to the door to see you this aft'noon," said Abby, bending to blow the reluctant little flames into brisker life. "He left his card, an' who d' ye s'pose it was? I studied over it quite a spell before I remembered."

"It was James Blake," said Miss Cynthia quietly. "I met him on the way home."

"Fer *goodness*' sake! wha' 'd *he* want?" demanded Abby Whiton. "An' where in creation did he come

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from? I wouldn't 'a' knowed him from Adam! would you?"

Miss Cynthia made no reply. She had dropped into a chair and was staring thoughtfully at the leaping flames.

"I guess mebbe you'd better take your things off an' stay a spell," observed Abby Whiton, with a delicately sarcastic sniff. She turned her back on the small figure of her mistress and sought the seclusion of her kitchen, where she grumbled suspiciously into the depths of the coal-hod and exploited her disturbed feelings through the safe medium of the iron tea-kettle.

"Ef she sh'd git to sparkin' (thump) at her age (thump—thump) the' ain't no tellin' how it 'ud come out! (thump, thump, bang!)"

XVI

ON the second morning after Miss Cynthia's meeting with James Blake the postman delivered a letter into the hand of Abby Whiton. Miss Whiton had been engaged in strenuous conflict with the flying leaves, which raced hither and yon in impish glee, as if defying her and her powerful implement of warfare.

"I d'clare the' ain't a season of the year when things is reel neat outdoors," she complained to the postman. "What with snow an' slush in winter, an' tree-blows all over ev'rythin' in the spring, an' caterpillars an' birds an' cherrystuns, an' goodness knows what all a-messin' things up in summer, an' these 'ere pesky leaves in th' fall—it doos seem 's 'o the Creator might ha' had more consid'ration for orderly folks!"

She paused to finger the thick letter directed to her mistress in a man's small, firm handwriting. "*I want-ta-know!*" she muttered suspiciously. "Now, I wonder ef he'd hev the gall—after all these years. Course, she's got money, an' the' ain't nobody, 'cept *me*, to hender."

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Abby Whiton's memory was of a superior quality and texture, and she had recalled without effort the single romance of Miss Cynthia's life. She had thoroughly agreed with the late Mrs. Day and Grandmother Breyfogle in their strong disapproval of the penniless young man. And on one occasion she had experienced the peculiar satisfaction of intercepting a note intended for the girl's private perusal. It had been tucked under the doormat; Abby had found it there, and had conveyed it without delay to her mistress, with the remark that she hoped she knew her duty. Mrs. Day had praised her warmly for this act of service, Abby remembered. She also remembered Miss Cynthia's pale face and reddened eyes, as they appeared that morning at breakfast, and for many mornings and evenings thereafter.

"I do' know as I'd better inte'fere this time," the excellent woman cogitated, as she carried the letter upstairs. "She's gittin' old 'nough to know her own mind, ef she's ever a-goin' to."

She knocked resoundingly at her mistress' door. "Here's a letter," she announced. "An' I guess it's from *him!*"

She was vaguely disappointed in Miss Cynthia's manner as she received the letter. She deposited it quietly on the bureau, and immediately resumed the bit of mending she had in hand. "Mebbe it ain't from him, after all," reflected Abby Whiton. "Seems 's 'o she'd ought to ha' perked up an' showed a little more int'rest, if it was."

On the fourth morning thereafter she carried up a second letter; and a week later a third. "If these 'ere letters ain't from him, I'd like to know who in creation's a-writin' to her so frequent," Miss Whiton remarked to herself. She watched her mistress closely, and except that she now went out for her long walks without regard for the weather, she could detect no difference in her manner or conduct.

"I never heerd o' sech a thing es goin' out fer pleasure on a day like this," she ventured, by way of expostulation, when Miss Cynthia was about to sally forth in the face of a cold, driving rain. "Seems 's 'o it wa'n't hardly respectable."

"It doesn't hurt me a bit," said Miss Cynthia absently. "I like it. Besides, I've got to go and see old Mrs. Phillips; I promised her."

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"You sent her beef-tea an' jell yist'd'y," sniffed Abby. "Course, I b'lieve in doin' good; but the's sech a thing as carryin' it too fur."

"Not for me," Miss Cynthia murmured, with clouded eyes. "I didn't do anything for years and years. You know I didn't, Abby."

"I guess you done full es much es most folks," grumbled Abby, "an' now you're a-doin' twict es much es any other woman in this 'ere town. Folks 'll be sayin' you're reel bragity an' stuck-up, bein' so awful good an' charit'ble all of a suddent."

"I don't care what people say about me," answered Miss Cynthia, with a dispirited sigh.

The fourth letter arrived that afternoon. Abby Whiton placed it on the sitting-room mantelpiece; then stood back and regarded it thoughtfully, her hands on her hips. "I'll bet a dollar she ain't answered one of 'em!" she ejaculated. "I ain't seen her a-doin' it, anyhow, an' I've kep' my eye on her pretty constant. I d'clare it's 'nough to rile a saint!"

After a further period of reflection she removed the letter from its prominent position to a retired nook of her pantry shelf. Here it reposed until Miss Cynthia

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had returned from her walk and was well established by the cheerful fire, which Abby had fully accepted as one of the institutions of the newly-organised household.

"Here's another of them letters of hisn," Miss Whiton announced, handling the missive as gingerly as though it contained a charge of dynamite. "It come this aft'noon while you was out, an' I saved it fer you."

"Thank you, Abby," Miss Cynthia said, with an entire absence of surprise or pleasure. She laid the letter on the table at her side, and went on stroking the big maltese cat which had climbed to her lap.

"Well, ain't you a-goin' to read it?" demanded Abby sharply. Her flushed face exhibited undaunted determination in every puckered line.

Miss Cynthia looked up and met the old woman's shrewd, anxious eyes fastened expectantly upon her. "Why yes," she said, smiling faintly. "I mean to read it after a while!" The big cat purred loudly and arched his back under the steady motion of the little hand. "Would you like to know who the letters are from, Abby?"

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“I’ve b’en s’posin’ all ’long they was from *him*,” replied Miss Whiton, with a firm tightening of her lips. “’Tain’t ’s ’o I disremembered what happened a spell back. I’ve thought it all over sence them letters has been comin’, an’ do’ know but what we was all mistook in that young feller when he first come sparkin’ ye. He *looks* reel well-to-do. I took per-tic’lar notice of his clo’es the day he come t’ the door. But I guess ’t wouldn’t do no harm to be reel keerful. Like es not he’s got a wife and childern a-ready; I’ve heerd o’ such things before now.”

Miss Cynthia sighed. “Sit down, Abby,” she said kindly. Then she was silent for a time, absent-mindedly caressing the purring, fawning creature on her knees.

“The letters are from James Blake,” she said, at last. “I meant to tell you. You are the only one left to care much what happens to me. But it is not as you think, Abby. I have no thought of marrying.”

“Well, I’d like to know why not!” snapped Abby Whiton. “’F he’s respectable an’ well-to-do—an’ he cert’nly doos *look* so. An’ even ef he ain’t got much

prop'ty, 'tain't es if you hadn't got a-plenty. I do' know why you shouldn't hev a home an' husban', same's other folks. An' goodness knows the' ain't no pickin' an' choosin' to be done in this 'ere town with men as scurse es hen's teeth. It's prob'ly yer las' chance."

Miss Cynthia was staring into the fire. "'Abby," she said at last, "I've never made any will. I must do it—soon. I can't think what to do with the money. I wish I could leave it to help girls have good times while they—are young, and want good times *so much*." There was a passionate wail in her low voice.

Abby Whiton rose up with a smothered ejaculation of wrath. "Anybody'd think you was a full hunderd years old to hear you a-goin' on!" she exclaimed. "An' you a-growin' younger an' better-lookin' 'an I've seed you in years—not 'at I mean to flatter yer vanity a mite. A flatterin' tongue's an 'bomination to the Lord, an' you favor the Breyfogles too clost to be reelly han'some. But I'll say this much: you *hev* changed, an' not fer the worse. My! You could 'a' knocked me down with a feather the

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day I come home, an' seen you a-standin' there in that blue dress. I d'clare to goodness I thought I'd seen a ghost!"

Miss Cynthia's face wore a piteous little smile. "Oh, Abby," she breathed, "do you say your prayers?"

"Fer the *lan's sake!*" Miss Whiton eyed her mistress with horrified incredulity. "I sh'd *say* I did! I say 'em jest es reg'lar es I scrub the kitchen floor. Course I say 'em! Did you s'pose I'd fallen from grace? Well, I'll bet I ain't!"

"Do—you—ever—pray—for—*me*?"

"Well, I just guess I *do*! Cert'nly, I do, Miss Cynthy. I hope I know my dooty. I've remembered you 'fore the throne of grace sence you was a baby. Tell you was turned fifteen, I ast the Lord to make you a good, 'bedient child—an' you cert'nly did mind *me* when you come in the kitchen. Then I took to intercedin' 'at you mightn't be kerried away with foolishness an' the pride o' the world,—'bout that time you kind of took a notion of fixin' yer hair all perky an' curly, an' I caught ye a-lookin' in the glass too frequent. I kep' that up pretty constant till

you was twenty past, an' Jim Blake was out the way. Of late years I've b'en wrestlin' in prayer to hev you kep' in the straight an' narrer way tell you git through this 'ere vale of tears an' safe to heaven. I'm sure the' can't nobody ast no more 'an that fer nobody!"

Miss Cynthia pushed the big cat from her knees. Her face had grown suddenly pale and pinched. "Please don't pray that prayer for me any more!" she begged tremulously. "Don't, Abby! *Please don't!* I don't want to go to heaven for a long, long time. You don't want I should, do you, Abby?"

"You don't s'pose I'm reelly yearnin' fer another fun'ral, do ye?" demanded Abby, with a grim humour which only partly concealed her real emotions. "I ain't the soft-soap kind, an' never was, but I guess you c'n make out what I think 'bout you without me a-tellin' ye. All I've got to say is, ef that kind of prayin' don't suit, I c'n change it to anythin' you say."

Abby's unquestioning faith in the potency of her petitions did not appeal to Miss Cynthia's sense of humour. She raised witsful, imploring eyes to the

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puckered old face. "I wish," she began, slowly and with long pauses, "that you would pray to have me live a long time. I want—to—to *live*. And please 'don't put in anything about this vale of tears when you pray for me. I don't want to cry any more, Abby. Seems to me I've hardly ever laughed. I should like to laugh—a good deal, and—and be happy. People do, you know—good people. It isn't wicked to be happy, do you think it is, Abby?"

"Mebbe I've be'n a-doin' wrong by her all these years without thinkin' a word about it!" muttered Abby, in the privacy of her kitchen pantry. "Prayers is awful powerful things. Most all of mine hes b'en answered, first an' last."

Then she sank on her knees beside the flour barrel and closed her eyes.

"O Lord!" she petitioned devoutly, "I do' know es I understan' what Miss Cynthy 'd ought to hev es well es I thought I done. I reelly ain't s' sure es I was once what's good fer her. She's cert'nly got some queer notion er other in her head 'at I can't make out. But, O Lord! I do want she should be happy—jest es happy es she kin be. An', O Lord!

seein' es she's kind of set against goin' to heaven, won't you let her live a consid'able spell. The's times when I feel 's 'o I'd jest es soon pass over the river es not, but Miss Cynthy, she don't seem to hanker none fer the golden streets; so jest let her git her fill of livin'—good, happy, healthy livin'! Amen!"

She presently heard her mistress laugh, a little, low laugh of pure enjoyment; and peeping in at a crack of the door she beheld her deep in the perusal of the letter. "That soun's more like it," said Abby Whiton to herself, with real satisfaction. "Jim Blake was bound an' determined to see the fun in ev'rythin', I remember; always a-laughin' an' carryin' on. That was one reason the folks couldn't abide him. Miss' Day us't to say he was light-minded an' triflin', an' Gran'ma Breyfogle, she hadn't no airthly use fer anybody without prop'ty."

Miss Cynthia had laughed more than once over James Blake's thick letters. She had cried, too,—cold, reluctant drops which left her eyes tired and smarting.

"Just to prove to you that I haven't really forgotten," he said, in his first letter, "and to make a

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good, square foundation for what I hope will come afterward, I'm going to tell you of everything we did fifteen years ago. If I get things mixed, you must set me right."

There had followed curiously boyish accounts of the old school days, when he had carried her books for her to a certain corner, beyond which the sharp eyes in the windows of the Breyfogle house made it unsafe to go.

"There was a Sunday-school picnic in Bentley's grove one year," he wrote, "and, wonder of wonders, you were allowed to come to it with your teacher. A good soul was Mrs. Turner. What has become of her; do you know? You wore a thin, black dress with round, pink spots all over it, and a straw hat with blue ribbons."

Miss Cynthia shook her head, with a little laugh. "I wore a black muslin with little, white briar roses running all over it," she said, and sighed.

Then she turned again to the letter. "We sat in the edge of the meadow and told each other's fortunes with daisies, and you stuck my hatband full of them. I was ashamed of the hat because it was old and

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shabby. I was often ashamed of my clothes in those days. But you were always as fresh and neat as a daisy that had opened over night.

“Once I wrote some verses about you, and that old cat of an Abby Whiton found them and gave them to your mother. I see old Abby is with you yet, and looking more vinegary and nipped than ever. She didn’t know me when I called; but I remembered her all right.”

There was not a word in these first letters about the writer’s present life, and Miss Cynthia wondered at it shyly. They were written from a western city, on big square sheets of paper which breathed a delicate aroma of fine tobacco, so suggestively masculine that Miss Cynthia shut the letters carefully into her bureau drawer when she undressed at night.

She spoiled many sheets of her own small, violet-tinted paper before she managed to say what she had vaguely determined upon before the arrival of the first letter.

“Friend James: (she wrote, in her fine, pointed hand) I am very much obliged to you for writing to me. It has seemed almost like being young again

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to read your letters. I never knew letters could be like that. But I don't want you should write to me any more. Once I was very unkind to you, and I am sorry, as I told you. I am trying to be kind now, so I must say, please don't write to me again. And don't remember the old days, except to laugh at them, as you did before."

She signed her name stiffly, as to a business letter. Then she tried hard not to expect an answer. When one came, very promptly, she was so glad she cried. Afterward she shut the letter, unread, into her bureau drawer for a whole day.

"I have no right to let him—love me again," she told herself passionately. "It would be more cruel than it was before, and more deceitful. But oh, I can't tell him—*I can't!*"

It had occurred to her more than once that she might go to Boston and consult the doctor. "If I should be getting better!" she thought, with a strangling heart-throb. "But if I am really worse—and he should tell me so—right out, the way he did before, I couldn't bear it—*now.*"

By slow degrees the autumn merged slowly into

winter. Before Thanksgiving Day the streets of Innisfield were piled high with snow, and jangling sleighs passed back and forth before the old Breyfogle house on Maple Street.

Abby Whiton petitioned the Lord night and morning, and at odd moments, behind the pantry door, and down in the vegetable cellar, and sometimes with merely the thin shelter of her checked gingham apron between her closed eyes and the world. And the burden of all these fervent prayers was for Miss Cynthia that she might "live out her days, O Lord! an' be happy, an' laugh more'n she doos!"

XVII

DEACON SCRIMGER stood on the bleak piazza of the parsonage and laid hold upon the handle of the door-bell with an energy which sent a jangling peal through the silent house. It was Saturday morning and the hour was half-past ten. Little Mrs. Pettibone came at once to the door; she looked worried and anxious as she admitted the old man into the narrow, sparsely furnished hall.

"I s'pose the dominie's to hum," began the deacon, blowing his nose a resounding blast, as he deposited his shabby old hat on the hall table. "My! the pars'nage feels mighty warm an' comf'table this mornin'. The' 's very few folks, Mis' Pettibone, 'at c'n afford to burn so much fuel in these 'ere hard times. It must cost the paster a good deal, I sh'd say."

"We are obliged to keep the house warm on account of Mr. Pettibone's weak throat," the minister's wife made haste to explain. "We try to economise in other ways," she added apologetically.

“H—m!” commented Deacon Scrimger, with an air of cautious reserve. “I see you git time to fuss with house-plants,” he went on, rolling his rheumy eyes about the little sitting room. “I hope the Lord’s business don’t suffer none on account of ’em. A paster’s wife has a great r’sponsibility a-restin’ on her—a great r’sponsibility. You’d ought to realise that, Mis’ Pettibone.”

“I try to,” murmured the little woman, with becoming meekness.

“Folks is bound to look up to ye fer an example,” continued the deacon. “An’ they’d ought to find ye with yer lamp always trimmed an’ burnin’. M’ wife was a-tellin’ me this mornin’ that you hadn’t called to see her fer quite a spell. N’glectin’ past’ral visitation ’s a turrible mistake fer a minister’s wife, Mis’ Pettibone; you’d ought to be a-goin’ to an’ fro on the walls of Zion purty constant. The fact is, this ’ere commun’ty is gittin’ alarmin’ly indiffer’nt to holy things. Sev’ral prom’nent members of the congregation hes spoke to me ’bout it of late. One contrib’ter to the paster’s salary says to me, ‘The sermons don’t seem to be a-takin’ holt, somehow,’ he

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says. 'The' ain't 'nough sound doctrine in 'em,' he says."

The deacon paused to lace his horny fingers comfortably across the pit of his stomach. "I've be'n noticin' fer some time back 'at sinners is 'lowed to feel too easy in their lost condishun. What we reelly need in this 'ere commun'ty is a sound revival of religion; an' I've come 'round this mornin' calc'latin' to talk it over with the paster. I understan' the Methodists is plannin' to git one up. I tell ye *they've* got a man 'at's up an' a-doin'!"

Two pink spots had appeared in Mrs. Pettibone's cheeks; her little hands were folded tightly in her lap. "Could you—would you mind—waiting till—till some other time to talk this over with Mr. Pettibone?" she asked, with a dogged timidity of manner. "Mr. Pettibone is so very busy with his sermon this morning I told him I wouldn't disturb him, except for something *very important*. If you would excuse him till Monday, perhaps."

Deacon Scrimger's mouth had screwed itself into a puckered knot during the progress of this speech; his eyes had narrowed into crafty slits. "What's the

paster be'n a-doin' with his time all the week till now?" he demanded sharply. "Seems 's 'o as long's he's hed nothin' else to occ'py his time sence the Sabbath 'at his sermon'd ought to be pretty nigh drawed to a close come Sat'day. As fer somethin' important, what's more important 'an *lost souls*? I guess I'll jes' step right int' the study, Mis' Pettibone, an' put that question to the paster; mebbe it 'll give his sermon the snap 'at's be'n a-wantin' in 'em lately."

Mr. Pettibone laid down his pen with a patient sigh as the loud creak of his study door apprised him of the dreaded interruption. He was a pale, scholarly-looking man, with a fine, grave face lined with the severe doctrines of his creed and the manifold perplexities incident to his pastoral charge in Innisfield. He greeted Deacon Scrimger with a cordial hand-clasp, which conveyed no hint of the prayer for fresh supplies of Christian charity which he had promptly put up at sight of the old man's long-drawn face.

"I've jest be'n a-havin' a few words of counsel with Mis' Pettibone," observed the deacon, as he seated himself with a deliberation which betokened a lengthy visitation. "I was reelly s'prised to learn f'om her

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thet you hadn't completed yer prep'rations fer the comin' Lord's day."

"I seldom do until Saturday," said Mr. Pettibone, with a determinedly pleasant smile. "I have always considered it a wise practice to finish my sermon after the pastoral work of the week is over. I find suggestive material in the spiritual condition of the people themselves, you understand."

"Wall, now, it don't 'pear to *me* that's any way to write a sermon," replied the deacon, with a controversial clearing of the throat. "It ain't the proper way to persent the doctrines; an' that, I take it, is your business in the pulpit. You'd ought to git over the field 'bout once a year. Say, take baptism an' sich in the spring, an' mis'laneous doctrines in the summer; but come this season o' the year sinners need to hear about hell-fire an' everlastin' punishment, an' the abidin' wrath o' the Almighty."

Mr. Pettibone smiled. He was tempted to tell a harmless little ministerial joke concerning the advisability of presenting the subject of the nether fires in cold weather, but he discreetly refrained.

Deacon Scrimger took acrid notice of the smile, and

it spurred him on to greater freedom of speech than he had before ventured upon with his dignified pastor. He leaned forward and planted his elbows on his knees, the better to scan the minister's face. "D' you want to know what some folks—payin' contrib'ters, too—is sayin' 'bout you?" he demanded. "They say 'at they've heered on good 'thority 'at your wife don't b'lieve in the devil."

The Reverend Pettibone drew himself up with a portentous frown. "My wife's beliefs need not be a matter of discussion between us, brother," he said stiffly. "I think you have never found me lax when it came to presenting the doctrines of the church."

"Yes, I hev," contradicted the deacon triumphantly, "I ain't heerd a sermon on the subjec' of the devil sence you was married to Philura Rice. Folks need to be roused up on the subject, I tell ye. Ain't he a roarin' lion, goin' about seekin' whom he may devour, I'd like to know? An' I'll let you know 'at th' adversary's a-gittin' in powerful work in this 'ere commun'ty right now. We'd ought to be roused up."

"I agree with you, Brother Scrimger, that the work seems to be languishing somewhat," said Mr. Petti-

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bone, with a worried sigh. "If our church-members could only be made to realise the outflowing love and power of God——"

Deacon Scrimger interrupted his pastor with a violent explosion of senile coughing. "Thet's *jest* it!" he complained; "thet's the sort of talk you've be'n a-givin' us f'om the pulpit till we're all well-nigh sick an' tired of it. The' ain't no snap in that kind of preachin', I tell ye. 'Tain't the sort to 'rest the 'tention of lost souls an' keep 'em out o' hell. They set back in their seats an' go to sleep on th' brink o' torment, whilst you're a-moseyin' on 'bout what the *church-members* had ought to be a-doin'. The' ain't no airthly use of wastin' yer time on th' elect. We're boun' fer the heavenly city, an' we don't *need* no such preachin'."

Deacon Scrimger rolled up his eyes to the ceiling with the air of a hoary old cherub. His pastor regarded him with a perplexed frown. "What I have preached regarding the lovingkindness and mercy of God ought to appeal to saints and sinners alike," he said, after a thoughtful pause. "It has been so impressed upon my mind of late years that I

feel more and more impelled to give it to the world. It seems to me that is what the world is hungering and thirsting for."

"He—he—he!" giggled the deacon, with rasping scorn. "That's be'n purty evident to the most of us; an' 'tain't hard to guess where you git your pecooliar views. Wall, I called in to talk up the subjec' of a revival this mornin'. I s'pose you've kep' yer eyes on what the Methodists are a-doin'. That new man of theirs is a hustler f'om wayback. He's a-givin' 'em doctrine, hot an' heavy, right erlong, an' he's a paster 'at knows his biz f'om a to izzard. I heered he'd got the Northrup fambly to hire a pew there, an' Northrup 's a moneyed man. Did you an' Mis' Pettibone git around to see 'em? I heered you didn't."

"I called upon the family soon after their arrival in town," said Mr. Pettibone coldly. "They informed me that they were in the habit of attending the Methodist church, so I notified Mr. Smiley of the fact."

"Huh!" exploded the deacon wrathfully, "that ain't no way to build up Zion, an' I guess you'll fin' it out;

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pew-rents ain't a-goin' to pay yer salary this year, an' everythin' way up in gee. Money's closter 'an it's be'n in years."

The minister was silent, his long, pale fingers drumming absent-mindedly upon his desk.

"I do' know how in creation we c'n pay fer it," pursued the deacon lugubriously, "but I'm in favour of procurin' the services of a good, smart, godly evangelist to come an' labour 'mongst us fer a spell. Somepin's got to be done, or we'll hev to shet the church doors."

Still the minister was silent. His face had assumed a look of dignified composure under suffering, such as a martyr might have worn with propriety.

"The' 's be'n consid'able dissatisfaction amongst the payin' contrib'ters, off an' on," Deacon Scrimger resumed with an inquisitorial air. "I felt 's 'o it was my Christian dooty to mention it."

The Reverend Pettibone suddenly rose up to his full height—he was a tall man. "I think I fully appreciate your motives, Brother Scrimger," he said dryly. "I shall consult the Session of the church about these and various matters at an early opportunity." He

glanced at his watch. "I am sorry to appear rude, brother, but as I have a funeral service at half-past eleven, I shall be obliged to suspend our conversation for the present."

When the door had fairly closed on the lingering visitor, little Mrs. Pettibone came flying into the study. Her blue eyes were very bright, her cheeks very pink, she was half laughing, half crying, as she flung herself down on her husband's knee, and threw her arms about his neck. "Oh, you poor dear, you!" she cooed, "I tried hard to keep him out, but he just marched right in, in spite of me. Don't you mind a thing he says, dearest."

The Reverend Pettibone rested his tired head upon her little shoulder. "You are such a precious comfort," he breathed. "What should I do without you?"

Mrs. Pettibone laughed joyously. "I don't know, I'm sure," she said wisely. Then she kissed him twice on the little bald spot which was beginning to appear where the dark hair had once been thickest. "Every single thing—even our worries—works together for good to those that *love* good," she whispered. "Isn't

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it *good* to remember that! Now, dear, come to lunch, it's all ready and you haven't much time."

One of the results of the interview between the Rev. Silas Pettibone and his solicitous parishioner became evident during the first week of the new year, when it was formally announced from the pulpit that a series of revival services would be held in the Presbyterian church, conducted by the pastor, who would be ably assisted by the well-known evangelist, Rev. G. 'Algernon Guffey, and the sweet singer of Israel, Filbert Swick.

It was observed (particularly by Mrs. Pettibone) that the minister's earnest face appeared more pallid and grave than usual as he read this important notice, but there was no lack of unction in his carefully prepared comments on the coming "season of grace." The congregation understood vaguely that their pastor had laid himself, a willing sacrifice, upon the altar of the cause.

It was understood also that the Rev. G. Algernon Guffey and his adjutant would make their headquarters at the parsonage while controlling the campaign. This was felt to be quite as it should be,

more particularly as the slow-growing fund in the hands of the finance committee would not be depleted by bills for board and lodging for the temporary labourers, whose services were otherwise rated very high indeed.

Mrs. Buckthorn confided to Miss Pratt with an air of hardly concealed pride, that the Rev. Guffey wouldn't hear to coming to Innisfield till an agreement guaranteeing him a hundred and fifty dollars per week had been signed by ten financially responsible church-members, headed by the pastor; while Mr. Filbert Swick's services commanded the modest sum of twenty-five dollars the week (payable strictly in advance). It was felt, however, to be well worth while in a community in which society languished as the snow deepened. The principal of the village school was exhorted to shorten all school exercises and tasks in order that the young people might be free to assist in the singing under the leadership of Mr. Swick. Incidentally, it was to be expected that these young persons would be "saved."

Miss Cynthia Day expressed but a languid interest in the proposed "revival." She subscribed, with her

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new-found liberality, to the fund which was being raised for the purpose, but she told Mrs. Buckthorn, who was actively engaged in canvassing the neighbourhood, that she could not promise to attend the meetings.

“I’m *afraid* you’ll miss a *blessin’*, Cynthia, if you set idly by whilst the Spirit is bein’ *poured out*,” sighed Mrs. Buckthorn. “You’d ought to come up to the help of the *Lord* against the *mighty*! The’ ’s goin’ to be sunrise prayer-meetin’s every mornin’, an’ ten o’clock meetin’s fer church-members, an’ aft’noon mass-meetin’s, an’ a five o’clock female prayer-meetin’, an’ reg’lar preachin’ services every evenin’ with after meetin’s fer inquirers, besides experience meetin’s fer backsliders. It ’ll be a glorious time! The Rev. Guffey is a reel power in the pulpit; they do say folks is comin’ way f’om State Bridge an’ Farmsley to hear him.”

“Did you say that both of those men were to stay at the parsonage?” inquired Miss Cynthia.

“Cert’nly, where’d you *s’pose* they’d stay? It ’ll be a *reel* spiritual *blessin’* to be under the same roof with ’em. I do hope our paster ’ll get livened up,

an' stren'thened in the doctrines; an' as fer Philura Pettibone, I'm a-prayin' that *she'll* git *soundly converted*. *She needs it!*"

"I don't see how she'll find time to do anything except cook for three hungry men," observed Miss Cynthia thoughtfully.

"She'll be to *every* meetin'," said Mrs. Buckthorne tranquilly. "She *wouldn't dare to stay away*. Of course some of us ladies 'll sen' her in a cake or a pie now an' agin to help out; I can't say 'at I think much of Philura's cookin'. She never had *much* to do *with* before she was married, an' they hev to cut an' trim pretty close to git along on his salary, I shouldn't wonder."

Mrs. Pettibone squeezed Miss Cynthia's little hands very tight in both her own, when that lady called at the parsonage for the express purpose of interfering with the arrangements of the committee. "I can entertain both of those men easier than you can," insisted Miss Cynthia. "Abby is perfectly willing, and I have plenty of room."

"I just love you for wanting to do it," exclaimed Mrs. Pettibone impulsively; "but you mustn't think

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of it. We're obliged to have Mr. Guffey with us. He says he must have Mr. Pettibone right at hand every moment to tell him about people, and to do things for him. Besides he can't eat the way other people do. He wrote me that he always required two soft eggs with toast for breakfast, and they must be perfectly fresh. That's easy, of course, but he wants his heartiest meal at ten o'clock in the evening, right after service. He says a bit of tender steak or a couple of lamb chops nicely broiled agrees with him best. He has the most awful dyspepsia. I'm to come home right after the preaching service and get his supper, and that will keep me away from the experience meeting. I do hope you won't think I'm very wicked, but I'm glad I won't have to speak in meeting. I never could bear to."

"I shall take the other man, anyway," said Miss Cynthia decidedly. "Is there anything peculiar about his diet that I ought to know?"

"Oh, no; all Mr. Swick wants in particular is a piano in good tune. He's a real nice-looking young man. Have you seen his picture? If you haven't you will. They're to be all over town, in all the shop-

windows, and in the depot. Mr. Pettibone is out seeing to that now. He's so worried."

"Worried!" echoed Miss Cynthia.

"There! I oughtn't to have said *that*. I am just going to *believe* it will come out all right. And won't you believe it, too? That 'll help. We've *got* to *believe*, you know, that things are working for *good*, *every minute*."

"I wish I could," sighed Miss Cynthia.

Miss Cynthia found herself actually glad of the presence of Mr. Filbert Swick in her house. He was a red-cheeked, broad-shouldered, complacent youth, who had not yet assimilated the elation incident to acquiring a good income in an astonishingly easy manner.

"It was just this way," he confided to Miss Cynthia during the second week of his stay. "I was clerking it in a shoe-store in Elmira when Mr. Guffey was holding union meetings there. You never saw anything like the time we had there. Great excitement, everybody interested. I tell you, G. Algernon Guffey knows how to get hold of folks every time. But his singer was taken down with grippe right in

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the middle of it, and lost his voice. They *was* up against it, for sure.

“Well, the Committee sent for me. I’d been singing in the church choir off an’ on, and in Y. M. C. A. meetings an’ that sort of thing, but I’d never got a red cent for it. I’d no idea I could swing the job; but Guffey—why, somehow, do ye know that man c’n make anybody believe anything he wants ’em to—he wouldn’t *hear* to anything else. So I went in with him, then an’ there, an’ I’ve been at it ever since.”

Mr. Swick’s youthful satisfaction with himself and his work was a pleasant thing to witness. He was possessed of a robust baritone voice, and in the brief intervals between services he lifted it up in Miss Cynthia’s parlour, in long-drawn solos, calculated to melt the obdurate human heart as differentiated in remote country districts.

Miss Cynthia listened musingly as he voiced a wailful inquiry for a lost wanderer out on the hills of time. The song made her feel vaguely uncomfortable, though she would have found difficulty in explaining the reason for it. It might have been merely because Mr. Swick’s voice when adventured

upon the higher peaks of song was a thought flat and nasal.

"That fetches 'em most every time," observed Mr. Swick complacently, as he struck a few loud chords with his blunt fingers. "I'm to give 'em that to-night after the sermon. I wish you'd come and hear me," he added, with a touch of boyish wistfulness. "I wrote to mother and told her how good you are to me, and she sent her love."

"Did she?" smiled Miss Cynthia. She hesitated a little, then said quietly, "Well, I will come to the meeting to-night—just to hear you sing."

"You'll get a blessing," Mr. Swick assured her with sincere, if stereotyped, enthusiasm. "Guffey is going to give 'em one of his soul-winners. It's the one about Dives an' Lazarus. I've seen it raise folks right out of their seats—that is, after I get through singing my solo. Guffey always has me sing that particular song just before he makes his final appeal to sinners and backsliders. We expect to make a big haul to-night. Everything's in train for it."

He glanced doubtfully at his hostess, then with a fine imitation of the Rev. Mr. Guffey's authoritative

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manner he remarked, "I've been much concerned about your spiritual welfare of late, sister. How is it with your soul?"

Miss Cynthia blushed. "I—I don't know," she faltered, taken quite unaware. "I hope—I trust——"

Mr. Swick shook his head.

"I fear that you have grown cold and indifferent in the midst of your wealth and luxury," he said gloomily. "I feel that it is my duty to deal with you quite plainly—in fact, Guffey urged me to do it. You know you've been out every time he called," he finished, in a burst of youthful candour.

Miss Cynthia was looking down at her little hands, folded loosely in her lap. She made no reply.

"If you should die to-night, sister," Mr. Swick went on with a sudden resumption of his quasi-professional manner, "how would it be with your soul?"

He was astonished at Miss Cynthia's reception of this pertinent inquiry. She had risen and was regarding him with wet, indignant eyes. "You have no right to ask me such a question," she said, in a low, vibrant voice. "Do you hear me? You have no right?"

She turned and left the young man, sitting dazed and irresolute upon the piano-stool.

Mr. Swick heard her hurrying feet upon the stairs. "Gee!" he muttered involuntarily, "I wish Guffey hadn't put me up against that job."

XVIII

THE Rev. G. Algernon Guffey had preached his great sermon on Dives and Lazarus to a crowded house. Behind him rose the serried ranks of the choir, the girls gay with ribbons and tossing feathers, the young men stiff and uneasy under the curious eyes of the congregation. At the evangelist's right hand sat Mr. Pettibone, pale and worn with the fatigue of his conflicting emotions. The hush that followed the preacher's vivid portrayal of the serene bliss of Abraham's bosom, as contrasted with the burning torments of hell, was broken by Mr. Swick's youthful voice upraised in long-drawn, sonorous cadences. The singer had taken a position on the platform directly in front of the evangelist, who was observed to direct the crescendos and diminuendos of his song in low, cogent whispers.

"Slower, now—*very soft!* Loud! Bring it out strong!" as his trained eye studied the excited faces bent forward to listen.

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Most of the women were in tears, and many of the men sat with white, strained faces when the last, lingering inquiry for the lost wanderer died away amid the crowded galleries.

A tense silence, prolonged to the verge of the intolerable, followed, during which the pale eyes of Mr. Guffey travelled slowly from pew to pew. Heads were bent to avoid that inexorable gaze; women shivered and moaned; children set their little teeth to keep from crying aloud. A wave of irresistible power was sweeping the plastic crowd. Did it emanate from the small, slender man with the terrible, accusing eyes? Or was it something more mysterious, more terrible still?

He was speaking now, deliberately, quietly, but with what seemed to the excited congregation an unearthly comprehension of their weak, struggling desires. To be "saved," it appeared, one must rise and come forward to the front pews. There was no other way—no other time. He who hesitated now was lost indeed—"Forever Lost!" The final words rolled out over the swaying throng like the tolling of a funeral bell.

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A woman raised her voice in a faint shriek of anguished despair. "Wait!" she cried. "I am coming!" and staggered down the aisle. Instantly the choir broke forth into the triumphant swing of a revival hymn, and the aisles were filled with hurrying figures. The crest of the slow-gathering wave was sweeping in.

In the farthest corner of the Breyfogle pew sat Miss Cynthia Day. She had come to the meeting as she had promised, after a faint-hearted apology to Mr. Swick which that young man had received with boyish embarrassment.

"You see, I'm studying between seasons to be an evangelist myself," he explained to Miss Cynthia. "But somehow I can't seem to get hold of the knack of saying those things about dying and the state of the soul that Guffey has. I don't believe anybody could stan' up against Guffey! He's got such a way with him."

Miss Cynthia, sitting quietly in her own pew, had been singularly unmoved by the sermon. It had seemed to her forced, theatrical, insincere. And because of this inevitable conclusion the Breyfogle

conscience was taking her severely to task. She winced under the pale radiance of Mr. Guffey's eyes, which seemed to focus directly upon her shrinking little self. "How can I be so cold?" she asked herself passionately. "Why do I not respond?"

She wished, with a curious, detached longing which seemed to lay hold upon her limp body like an invisible hand, to rise and join the kneeling, weeping throng which was gathering in the front pews.

"One more!" the Reverend Guffey was saying, in low, urgent tones. "Two more! Won't *you* come and be saved, brother? Won't you come, sister? Come *now*, or it will be too late! The grave yawns deep! Eternity opens before you!"

His strange, compelling eyes were riveted upon Miss Cynthia. He was speaking directly to her, with uncanny prescience. She was rising—moving forward!

"Thank the Lord fer *that*!" murmured a piously nasal voice. "She's be'n an awful back-slider!" Mrs. Buckthorn had flung wide her bonnet-strings, and was leaning back in her pew with the complacent

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unction which is assumed to be the peculiar portion of the securely elect.

Deacon Scrimger, who sat across the aisle, was swaying back and forth with automatic regularity, emitting snorting ejaculations from time to time. He greeted the tremulous little figure of Miss Cynthia with a loud "Yes—yes! Lord!—Amen! *Glory!*"

Miss Cynthia heard and saw all with the confused vision of a hypnotic. She was thinking of but one thing, and that was how to gain the front pew in the most expeditious manner possible. She knew that she could find peace in no other way—in no other place.

Then her dazed eyes fell upon Harriet Puffer. The child's pink mouth had fallen open; her little hands clutched rigidly at the back of the pew. Edwina standing at her side was bathed in tears. Both children were pale and wild-eyed. Miss Cynthia stopped short, the colour rushing back to lips and cheeks. She smiled reassuringly at the twins. There was a vacant place in the pew beside them. She slipped in and sat down. The children cuddled close against her encircling arm like frightened birds.

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"Oh, Miss Cynthia!" whispered Edwina, "do you think we'll be lost? We're awful 'fraid, but we don't das' to go up in front."

"No, dear," she murmured. "There is nothing to be afraid of." Of a sudden she seemed flooded with an immense light and peace. She smiled radiantly into the astonished face of Mr. Guffey. His pale eyes no longer drew her toward the struggling, moaning crowd in the front seats.

His lips formed a single word—"Come!" He beckoned her with an authoritative gesture.

She shook her head, still smiling.

The "experience meeting" had begun. Miss Cynthia saw Mrs. Pettibone rise and slip away like a patient, smiling little ghost to prepare the late supper for the dyspeptic evangelist, and she heard Mrs. Buckthorn's loud-whispered comment on her withdrawal, "A-shirkin' her dooty, *as usual!*"

It was Mr. Pettibone's kind, tired voice which urged everyone present to take some part in the meeting. He reminded them of their obligations to their Maker who was not ashamed to call them his sons and daughters.

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“He ain’t got no more snap ’an a tow string!” complained Deacon Scrimger in the ear of his wife.

“I wisht he’d resign!” she replied.

Miss Cynthia could never have told just how it happened, but suddenly she stood up beside the Puffer twins. “All this”—she said, slowly, clearly—“is *not* finding—God. It is *not*—religion. To find God is to find love and happiness and peace—*and life—within ourselves*. We must love one another, and be kind—*be kind*.”

Then she passed quickly down the crowded aisles, and out under the quiet light of the stars.

It was bitterly cold, and the fresh-fallen snow creaked under her light feet. She was happy—even joyous, in the deepest depths of her.

All the fear and doubt and rigid holding on to life in the face of an awful, impending doom had left her.

“I am not afraid! I am not afraid!” she murmured, and lifted up her face to the dark sky which seemed to stoop warm and close, like the kind face of an infinite and compassionate love.

XIX

AT the close of the final service the Rev. G. Algeron Guffey found himself the centre of a stormy group composed of the more prominent members of the church. Among the indignant murmurs which reached his ear the raucous voice of Deacon Scrimger cut like a rusty sickle.

“Them words of Cynthia Day’s was jest the out-croppin’ of the damnable heresies which hes be’n a-growin’ up in this ’ere community fer years,” declared the deacon, smiting his horny palms together in a fine frenzy of righteous indignation. “I shell insist on callin’ a church meetin’ an’ gittin’ right down to the root of the hull business.” He glared malevolently at his pastor. “The’ ain’t no use in tryin’ to save the unconverted out o’ hell when per-fessin’ Christians is ’lowed to talk like that in a r’vival meetin’.”

Mr. Guffey raised his eyebrows. “Let us not be too hasty in condemning our sister,” he said judicially. “It is not given to every man to be so filled with the consuming anxiety after righteousness which

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you manifest, Brother Scrimger. As it is written, 'The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up'."

The deacon rolled his eyes proudly about the circle of attentive faces. "That's right, dominie; I ain't in favour of no halfway measures when it comes to r'ligious dis'pline," he remarked with a gratified chuckle. Then his lips tightened craftily. "I'd like a word with you in private, Brother Guffey," he whispered loudly, "concernin' the welfare of this branch of the Lord's Zion."

The evangelist laid his hand on the old man's shoulder. "Let us first sleep over the matter, brother, and the Spirit may see fit to instruct us in the night season," he murmured pacifically. "A word to the wise is sufficient."

"Well, I sh'd say Cynthia Day had ought to be dealt with *im-me-diatly*," broke in Mrs. Buckthorn, with a loud, discouraged sigh. "There's no knowin' how many *pr-recious* souls she's kep' out of the kingdom to-night. I sh'll spen' the hours between now an' midnight *on my knees*, an' go forth to wrestle with her the first thing to-morrow mornin'. What do *you* perpose to do, Mr. Pettibone?"

Thus appealed to, the pastor of the church became the target of a score of critical, expectant eyes. He hesitated visibly. "We should remember first of all the command of the Master and judge not," he said at length.

Fragments of whispered conversation were buzzing about his ears like teasing gnats; they arose from the circle of women that fringed the group. "They *do* say she's awful intimate with *his wife*—*she's* got the queerest ideas—A terrible backslider, *if not worse!*"

Mr. Guffey terminated the conference with practiced ease, somehow leaving the impression upon the minds of the assemblage that he privately agreed with the opinion of each one, and would shortly voice the sentiments of the many in a cogent utterance which would flatly crush the bold and presuming individual who had ventured to dissent from Innisfield standards of religious propriety. The evangelist adroitly contrived to detach Mr. Pettibone from his agitated parishioners, and presently the two men were walking alone on the frosty street.

"Tell me about that woman," said Mr. Guffey.

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"You mean Miss Day?"

"Of course, who else?"

Mr. Pettibone was silent for a moment. "I fear that I do not fully understand Miss Day's spiritual state," he said slowly. "She has been a member of this church in good and regular standing since early childhood, and I have observed nothing uncommon in her conduct until—well, really, I could not say just when the change took place; but she is certainly remarkably different from what she was."

He added a few sparse details concerning Miss Cynthia's more spectacular actions, to all of which the evangelist listened with grave attention.

"Most extraordinary, I should say," commented Mr. Guffey. "Did you preach her into all that, Pettibone?"

"I don't know," said the minister honestly.

Mr. Guffey's lips widened in his slow, inscrutable smile. "They tell me you are especially strong in urging the Sermon on the Mount upon your hearers. It isn't popular doctrine, you know."

Mr. Pettibone turned upon the evangelist suddenly. "It is the constitution of the Kingdom, as pro-

claimed by its founder," he cried, almost sharply. "I must urge it—*I must!*"

"And be crucified for it," said Mr. Guffey under his breath. "The Pharisees are on your track now, brother."

Mr. Pettibone lifted his worn face to the stars. "Even so come quickly, Lord Jesus!" he whispered.

It was the day after this significant conversation that Abby Whiton, energetically ridding the doorsteps of a crust of frozen sleet in the gray light of the January morning, discovered the massive form of Mrs. Buckthorn advancing toward the house. That excellent woman was heavily swathed in shawls, and the tip of her prominent nose, purpled with the cold, protruded from the frosty folds of her blue veil like the beak of a bird of prey.

Miss Whiton regarded this early visitor with an acrimonious smile. "Seems to me you're out pretty early this mornin', Mis' Buckthorn," she observed. "Ain't you 'fraid of gittin' rheumatiz?"

Mrs. Buckthorn groaned hollowly. "I'd reelly ought to be in my bed this minute, Abby Whiton," she re-

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plied. "But when dooty calls I'm ever to be found in the front ranks."

"What pertic'ler dooty 's ketched a-holt of you now?" demanded Miss Whiton tartly, as she applied her broom to the large, rubber-clad feet which Mrs. Buckthorn deliberately presented for cleansing. "The's times when folks gits their idees of dooty kind o' mixed up with other folks' bus'ness."

"Was you at the meetin' last night, Abby?" demanded Mrs. Buckthorn sternly.

"I hed m' bread to set," Miss Whiton replied evasively. "But if it's me you've come to talk to this mornin', I might 's well tell ye right off 'at I've got r'ligion a-plenty. I c'n tell the truth, 'most every time, an' I min' m' own business the endurin' while. Ef everybody done *that* right along I guess most folks 'ud think the m'lennium had struck 'em."

"My business here is no concern of yours, Abby," Mrs. Buckthorn said, compressing her lips with an air of pious endurance. "I've come to talk carefully *an'* prayerfully with Cynthia Day about the state of her immortal *soul*. You will let her know

that I am waitin' to see her. My time is *val-u-able!*" The final words were spoken in a loud, melancholy tone of voice calculated to penetrate careless ears in almost any part of the house.

"Hern is too," retorted Abby Whiton, with a defiant toss of her head. "I wouldn't wait ef I was you. Miss Cynthy don't need no talkin' to. She's jest a-gittin' so she's cheerful an' happy, an' I ain't a-goin' to hev her bothered 'bout her soul, so there!"

"Well, of *all things!*" Mrs. Buckthorn intoned, with deep-throated indignation. "You will call her *at once*, or I shall!"

The two women stared truculently at each other for a full minute; then, as the visitor made a determined movement toward the door, Abby Whiton threw it dramatically wide, disclosing her mistress in a rose-coloured morning-gown smiling over one of James Blake's voluminous letters.

"Here's Mis' Buckthorn come to talk *her kind of religion* with ye," she announced, with a trenchant sniff, and withdrew to the kitchen, whence the mundane clash of stove-lids and poker in active conflict

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was presently heard blending with the warlike strains of the Crusader's hymn.

Mrs. Buckthorn had divested herself of the outer sheath of veils and shawls, and stood wrapped, as it were, in the voluminous garments of her righteousness in the presence of the small rose-clad person who started to her feet in haste from a deep wicker chair by the fireside.

Miss Cynthia's face was fresh and smiling; her blue eyes shone with the violet light of immortal life.

"Good-morning," she said simply, but an unmistakable pæan of love and joy sounded in her low voice. She motioned her visitor to a seat with a gracious gesture, which somehow brimmed over the deep cup of that worthy matron's wrath and indignation.

"I do *grieve* to see you in this *ungodly* frame this morning, Cynthia," Mrs. Buckthorn began in a hollow, majestic bass. "I had *hoped* to find you with your hands on your mouth and your mouth in the dust crying 'unclean! unclean!' But I see only *too* plain that you've hardened your heart like *Pha-ra-oh!*"

Miss Cynthia hastily gathered the scattered pages

of her letter with trembling hands. "I don't know what you mean," she said. "I was feeling very happy this morning—very happy. I hope——"

"Happy!" ejaculated Mrs. Buckthorn, sinking heavily into a chair. "*Happy!*" Her eyes roved inquisitively over Miss Cynthia's gown. "It 's been *on my heart* for a *long* time to deal plainly with you, Cynthia; an' now I'm here to do it. I *fear* that all is not right with your *immortal soul*—judgin' from what I see an' hear."

Her curious eyes again busied themselves with the tips of Miss Cynthia's little slippers, ascending by slow degrees up the lace-trimmed front of the pink morning-gown and coming to a full stop upon the modest brooch which fastened the lace at her throat.

"Di'monds, I do believe!" she whispered, with a heartrending sigh. "Cynthia, I'm a-goin' to put a *solemn* question, an' I want you should answer it as if you was on your *dyin' bed*. *What* do you think your sainted ma would say to *all this*, if she was here?" An inclusive hand-sweep indicated Miss Cynthia's immediate environment, including the rose-coloured gown and the appurtenances thereof.

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"I don't know," answered Miss Cynthia in a low voice. She had grown very pale and her hand stole unconsciously to the laces on her breast.

"And *what*," pursued her inquisitor mercilessly, "do you think your dear, departed grandfather—who was a *pillar* in *Zion*—if anybody ever *was*—would say to the *terrible* setback you give our *blessed* r'vival las' night?—*Wait before you answer me*, Cynthia! for I see you don't *realise* what you done. Do you know I counted at least *six* sinners an' backsliders a-settlin' back in their seats as contented as could be after you spoke. *They* would have gone forward to the front pews an' been *saved*; but now they're lost forever! An' the terrible responsibility's a-layin' at *your door*! I don't see how you can set there in my presence, dressed up like the scarlet woman, with your di'monds a-glitterin' like sparks of hell-fire."

Mrs. Buckthorn closed her eyes after this burst of fervid eloquence and rocked back and forth in wordless anguish of spirit.

She opened them suddenly at sound of a harsh exclamation. Abby Whiton stood over her mistress

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white with fury. "I hope you're satisfied now!" she said in a hissing whisper. "The' don't anybody need to talk to *me* 'bout r'vivals! The's folks in this 'ere town 'at need to git manners more'n they do r'ligion, *an' they ain't fur off, neither!*"

She was plying the camphor bottle as she talked. Miss Cynthia struggled weakly to her feet to avoid a second blinding dash of the pungent fluid.

"That will do, Abby," she said with dignity. "I—I was so surprised at what Mrs. Buckthorn said that I hardly knew for a minute what I was doing."

"I'm glad to see you ain't calloused, Cynthia," observed that lady in her deepest bass. "The Spirit's quick an' powerful as a two-edged sword, you know. It's be'n known to kill sinners right in their tracks before now."

"Don't you das' to call her no sech names," snapped Abby Whiton. "She ain't no more of a sinner 'an you be. The simple idee of your a-settin' up to be a pattern to *her!*"

"Abby!" Miss Cynthia spoke very quietly; but Miss Whiton retreated kitchenward, after depositing

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the camphor bottle in a defiantly prominent position on the mantel-shelf.

"I declare, that woman's got the worst tongue in this town," observed Mrs. Buckthorn feelingly. "I wonder you'll keep her in your house."

"She loves me," Miss Cynthia answered gently.

Mrs. Buckthorn arose stiffly. "I've got to go now," she sighed. "I've got pie an' cake to bake an' m' dishes to wash up. I felt as though I couldn't get here *too soon*. I want you should spend the hours between now an' the evenin' meetin' *on your knees*, Cynthia. Then come to that *blessed* meetin' prepared to do your Christian dooty. You'd ought to take back every word of what you said las' night. If you humble your proud heart in the dust *maybe* the Lord 'll fergive you. An' I want you should know 'at *I* shall address the throne of grace in your behalf *myself*."

"Thank you," said Miss Cynthia, looking down at the toes of her slippers.

"An' will you *promise* me to do what I ask, my dear child?" gurgled Mrs. Buckthorn, with watering eyes. "I sh'll *feel* that I've accomplished my

whole dooty if you only *will*." She possessed herself of one of Miss Cynthia's reluctant hands and fondled it damply in both her own; then stooping suddenly kissed her full upon the mouth. "I sh'll be s' thankful an' happy to see you a-kneelin' in the front pews, like a brand plucked from the burnin', an' to *feel* that *my* hand was counted worthy to——"

"But I haven't promised," said Miss Cynthia doggedly. She shrank away from the woman's large body with an almost overpowering sense of physical aversion. "I shall not come to the service this evening, nor any evening," she finished positively.

"Why not?"

"Because I believe that what I said last night is true."

A red fury blazed evilly in Mrs. Buckthorn's dull, flaccid face. She turned away without another word, and Miss Cynthia, standing mute and motionless, heard two successive slams of two distant doors which announced her hasty exit.

Could she have followed the wrathful progress of her departing guest she might have witnessed a brief interview with the Rev. G. Algernon Guffey which

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took place at the corner of the street. Mr. Guffey was striding briskly through the snow with a cheerful, not to say jovial, expression of countenance which still further incensed the irate lady.

“I’ve just come from labourin’ with that poor, sinful, misguided soul, Cynthia Day—her that spoke those *wicked* words in our *blessed* meetin’ last night,” began Mrs. Buckthorn, with a hollow intonation of despair. “I couldn’t rest ner sleep till I’d gone forth to *deal* with her, heart to heart. I fear we sh’ll have to leave her to perish in her sins. She wouldn’t listen to *me*. But I feel I’ve done my *full dooty*. I’ve throwed out the life-line, as the beautiful hymn says, and if she won’t take a hold of it, it can’t be laid at *my* door.”

A glance of something like amusement shone for an instant in Mr. Guffey’s gray eyes, but he answered seriously, “I was just going to see Miss Day.”

“Well, I don’t think you’re called upon to waste your precious moments with *her*,” said Mrs. Buckthorn acrimoniously. “*I* said *all* that anybody *could* say. I found her sitting there all dressed up in pink flounces, trimmed with lace *an’ di’monds*, entirely

dead in trespasses an' sins. I declare, I'm fairly boilin' over with Godly wrath. If you *will* insist on goin' I hope *an' trust* you'll rebuke her sharply. *She needs it!*"

Mr. Guffey smiled understandingly. "I shall remember what you have told me," he said pleasantly. "By the way, Sister Buckthorn, will you do something for the cause? I am asking you because there is no one else to whom I can turn with confidence at the moment."

Mrs. Buckthorn's fat face creased itself into a dubious smile. "I'm generally to be found waitin' in the front ranks, ready an' willin' for the call of dooty," she remarked, with a tentative cough. "What was it you wanted I should do?"

"It occurred to me that if a lady of your standing in the community should personally visit the outlying houses in the neighbourhood of the tin-can factory and invite the operatives, their wives and children to attend the meetings, great good might be done."

"What! Go into all those dirty houses and talk with those shiftless women? No, Mr. Guffey, I don't feel that dooty calls me that way. My health is

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delicate, you know—very delicate. I have to be very cautious. But I can tell you who *ought* to be doin' that *blessed* work, an' that's our paster's wife. *That's what they're paid for.* An' while we're speaking of Mis' Pettibone, I feel as though I'd ought to tell you that *she* needs a serious talkin' to on the subjec' of her dooty to this church. I've had it *on my heart* for a long time to mention it. She's *very* far from bein' the kind of a paster's wife we need in this community. I do *grieve* to say it, but her influence on the paster is *very bad*. He ain't the same man 'at he was before he married Philura Rice."

"I can well believe it," Mr. Guffey said gravely. "Mrs. Pettibone is a remarkable woman, in many ways."

Mrs. Buckthorn compressed her lips. "You can't tell me anything I don't know about *Philura Rice*," she syllabled conclusively. "No *stranger* is capable of understanding her as *I* do. There's a *great deal* of dissatisfaction. Perhaps you've heard of it?"

Mr. Guffey looked steadily at Mrs. Buckthorn, and the lady's lids presently fell before the direct gaze of the evangelist's greenish-gray orbs. "I make it a

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point never to hear anything of the sort while employed in my special work," he remarked, in a gentle but particularly distinct tone of voice.

Mr. Guffey actually laughed aloud to himself and the surrounding silence as he opened the gate of the old Breyfogle place, and the light of his inward cogitations still shone pleasantly on his grave, composed face when Abby Whiton admitted him to Miss Cynthia's parlour.

Miss Cynthia, in quite a flutter of apprehension and rose-coloured flounces, came in to greet him. Mr. Guffey's experienced eyes noted the half-shed tears which sparkled on her lashes, and the agitated blushes fluttering over the delicate oval of her cheek.

"A bruised reed," he thought to himself, and wondered.

"You—you—must have been—very much displeased—and—and shocked at what I did last night," began Miss Cynthia, with a desperate effort to appear quite composed and dignified. "I was thinking of the children, you know; they seemed so—so frightened."

Mr. Guffey was looking at her very kindly indeed.

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"I am always sorry to see young children at our evening meetings," he said, in his low, sympathetic voice. "Little children need loving into the kingdom; but for the careless, stupid, hardened grown-ups one must sometimes use spiritual dynamite. It does frighten the children and—such as you. I am sorry."

Miss Cynthia's eyes brightened. "Oh how *kind* you are!" she exclaimed. "I was so—so——"

"You didn't want to see me," suggested Mr. Guffey, showing his white, even teeth in an amused smile. "Well, I am not always preaching, you see. And now won't you tell me how you came to find the heart of Christ's religion?—for you have found it. It is to find love and happiness and peace and life, and, having found it, to love one another and be kind. How did you discover this?"

"The doctor told me that I am going to die—*soon—next—April.*" Miss Cynthia spoke in a hushed voice, which yet sounded like a cry in her listener's ears. "I had to find—*something—I had to!* I found—*that.*"

Then, having uncovered her terrible little secret before this stranger, who was still regarding her more

kindly and tranquilly than ever, Miss Cynthia burst into tears. "I don't know why I have told you this," she faltered. "I had told no one—I meant to tell no one."

Mr. Guffey made no attempt to stay her weeping. He was wonted to woman's tears. But something in his strong silence presently quieted Miss Cynthia's low sobbing.

She looked up with a wistful smile. "What do you want me to do?" she asked him like a child.

"Would you like to visit the families on the east side of the river, and tell them what you have found and ask them to come to the meetings? They will need, perhaps, to kneel in those front pews, and do those simple, concrete things which help to wake a soul out of its deadening lethargy. Mind you, I do not think these things are religion in themselves; but they sometimes help dull souls to awaken out of sleep. And *anything* to wake them up, even if it be the brazen blast of a sermon like the one I preached last night. Do you understand me?"

Miss Cynthia was looking sweetly mystified. "I'm afraid I don't—altogether," she said. "But I'm so

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glad you came to see me. I know most of the women in those houses already. I will go to them right away."

She was searching the evangelist's worn face with anxious eyes. "Do you think—do you believe God will let me live—if I want to *very* much? Mrs. Pettibone told me——" She stopped short in wordless confusion.

"Christ was the Healer. He is with us always, and always the same, yesterday, to-day, and forever," said the man. "I know this much. I can say no more. I wish——" He paused abruptly, his strong features working with some unexplained emotion. "Good-bye," he said gently; "I shall, perhaps, not see you again."

XX

“WELL, an’ what ’d that man hev to offer?” demanded Abby Whiton, hastily selecting a hot flatiron from among the huddled group over the range fire. She faced about with dramatic suddenness and fixed searching eyes upon her mistress.

Miss Cynthia had appeared in the door of the kitchen, dressed for walking. She was paler than her wont, but Abby could detect no evidence of her late disquieting interview with Mr. Guffey upon her placid face.

“I mus’ say, I kind of liked his looks,” Miss Whiton added grudgingly. “But you can’t never tell about a man, minister er no minister. They’re all alike to me, anyhow!” She clashed her iron defiantly, as she eyed the small figure in the doorway.

“He wanted I should go and see the people down by the river,” said Miss Cynthia. “I am going now. I came to tell you that I may be late to dinner.”

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“I heerd him a-tellin’ ye that much,” Miss Whiton said unblushingly. “I couldn’t reelly make out all that was goin’ on betwixt you; you didn’t speak loud enough fer me to gether it all. I do b’lieve I’m gittin’ deaf in m’ right ear.”

“Oh, Abby, were you listening?”

“Well, I guess! D’ye s’pose I’m a-goin’ to let a strange man int’ the house—to pester ye, like es not—an’ me out in the kitchen? I’ll bet I know which way my dooty lays, es Mis’ Buckthorn says. Where’d you fetched up, I’d like to know, ’f I hadn’t a-be’n right on hand with the camphire when she was lettin’ out her spite an’ meanness on ye. *She* calls it the work of the sperit! It’s more like bein’ possessed with th’ devil, *I* sh’d say.”

Miss Whiton was evidently labouring under some strong mental excitement, for she set down the overheated iron in the middle of a damask napkin with an emphasis which left a faint, brown print on its snowy surface.

“Well, I guess mebbe it ’ll do ye good to git out in th’ air,” she went on; “it ’s come off a nice day in spite of everythin’.” She proceeded to fold and

crease the napkin with scrupulous care, leaving a brown mark on every burnished square. The smell of scorching linen pervaded the room.

“Did—you—hear everything that I—said to Mr. Guffey?” asked Miss Cynthia, with an involuntary shiver of apprehension. “*Did* you?”

“I didn’t hear nothin’ ’cept what I told ye jus’ now,” said Abby gruffly. “I mus’ say I think ’t was kind of nervy of *him* to expect you to go trampin’ ’round in the slush after them poor folks. Why in creation don’t he go himself, I’d like to know?”

Miss Cynthia drew a deep sigh of relief. “Seems to me I smell something burning,” she said, gazing short-sightedly at the strenuous motions of the iron. “Perhaps your flat is too hot. I must hurry right along now. Have dinner at two, please. I shan’t be hungry before then. Good-bye, Abby.”

Abby Whiton continued her work in stony silence till she heard the front door close after her mistress. Then she sank into a chair and threw her apron over her head. “Oh—Lord!” she groaned, “I told her a wicked lie right out. - I hed to. I did hear what she told him ’bout dyin’ in April. Oh—*Lord!* what *shell*

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I do. Seems 's 'o I couldn't stan' it *nohow!* 'Tain't right to let her die right *now*, jes' when everythin' 's comin' her way, an' Jim Blake ready an' anxious to keep stidy comp'ny. What 's the use of it, Oh—*Lord?* ”

She sprang up and replenished her fire with a sort of frantic energy. “I've jes' gotta do somethin'!” she cried aloud. “I ain't a-goin' to hev it so. Seems 's 'o there ought to be some way out of it. The' 's th' promises, an' they're plain readin' right out an' out, with no ifs ner buts about 'em.” She snatched a worn Bible from its nook on the top pantry shelf and hastily turned over the leaves with moistened thumb.

“*There!* I don't see how the's any gittin' out o' this. ‘*Whatsoever* ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask and receive that your joy may be full.’ ”

She sank on her knees beside the flour barrel, spreading the open Bible on top of the pastry-board which covered it. “Now, here I be, an' I'm a-goin' to take ye at your own word, O Lord—jes' as I see it set

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down in this 'ere Bible, right in these two verses of the gospil 'cordin' to John. I ain't been in the habit of pesterin' ye much fer myself. I c'n gen'lly git what I want, 'f I work hard 'nuff; but here 's somethin' I can't do, not ef I was to work my fingers to the bone. I want you should let Miss Cynthia *live*. I've spoke 'bout it before; but I didn't know then as the' was any danger of her goin' immej'ate. *O—Lord, let her live!* I ask it in the name of Jesus Christ. I want you should notice I'm a-leanin' *hard* on this p'tic'lar promise. *I sh'll expect it to be jest as I've said.* I don't see any way of gittin' out of it. I've done percisely what I was told to do in this 'ere Bible, an' now I've got a right to *expect* that she'll *live*. I c'n see it wouldn't be *right* fer me to fret an' worry 'bout her after this, an' I ain't a-goin' to—*not a minute*. I'm a-goin' to begin to *fill up on joy*. Amen!"

And Miss Cynthia, picking her way daintily along the wet and icy street, felt the mighty lift and impulse of this rude petition in an unreasoning gladness which seemed to enfold her like the warm, sweet breath of summer. She even found herself humming a gay little tune as she knocked at the door of one of the

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shabby little houses which huddled squalidly about the ugly structure known as the tin-can factory.

A sullen-faced woman with a crying baby in her arms opened to her summons. Miss Cynthia, obeying her ungracious gesture of invitation, entered the room; a damp, evil-smelling atmosphere, charged with boiling soap-suds and sodden food, greeting her on the threshold like the spirit of poverty.

“We’re all about done fer here,” droned the woman, jerking forward a rickety wooden chair with her one free hand. “This ’ere pesky young’n’ ’s cried every minute fer a week; I can’t git no rest with him night er day. An’ Tim, he ’s be’n on one of ’is sprees an’ guzzled down every cent of ’is wages, an’ the rent due an’ everythin’ goin to the bad. I wish ’t I was dead an’ done with it.”

The words flowed from the woman’s mouth in a turgid torrent, like the utterance of an insane person. Her thin, bent figure wavered weakly and her knotted fingers clutched despairingly at the wailing child’s dingy clothing.

“Let me take the baby,” entreated Miss Cynthia.

The woman dropped her burden with a long breath

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of relief. "I don' know why he was ever born to be the plague of my life an' 'is own," she muttered. "*I didn't want 'im. The's five more of 'em to feed.*"

Her glassy eyes filled with sudden tears at sight of Miss Cynthia as she smoothed down the huddled flannels about the infant's red neck. The little creature's wailing cries softened to a fretful murmur under the awkward touch of the gentle hand.

"He's just tired, I guess," cooed Miss Cynthia, stroking the downy head. "Poor baby, and you're tired, too, Mrs. Flannery. I'm so sorry."

The woman drew a long, sobbing breath. "I never expect to be anythin' else but tired," she said. "Never anythin' else till I'm a-layin' in m' coffin. That's the on'y place I know of to fin' rest. I wish t' God I was there now!"

"There's one other," Miss Cynthia breathed. "I—I've found it. I had to find it. Will you let me tell you?"

"The's no use in talkin' r'ligion to me—if that's what you mean," the woman said sullenly. "I hate an' d'spise all that pious rot rich folks talk when they come to see folks in my fix. It makes 'em feel so

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mighty snug an' comf'table to set in their silk clo'es an' jaw 'bout church-goin' an' prayin'. It makes me *sick*, I tell ye! Kin God make my husban' quit drinkin', I'd like to know? Kin he give me a decent place to live in, an' decent victuals to eat, an' any peace to m' life? You *know* r'ligion ain't any good fer *real trouble* like mine! It's jest—*damned lies!*”

The woman's voice rose to a frenzied shriek with the last words. She shook her thin hands above her head with a hoarse, inarticulate cry like that of a suffering animal.

“Could you give me a cup of tea, Mrs. Flannery?” asked Miss Cynthia unexpectedly. “I should like it very much, if it isn't too much trouble. I've had a long walk, and I didn't eat much breakfast.”

The woman stared at her in puzzled silence for an instant. Then she rose stiffly and set the kettle over the fire. Two or three untidy children scattered in obvious fright at her approach.

“I don' know as you'll like the kin' of tea I hev to put up with,” said the woman, as she set a cracked cup full of steaming liquid on the table. “I ain't got no sugar.”

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“Thank you, it’s very nice,” Miss Cynthia told her, as she began sipping the hot tea from the discoloured spoon. “Won’t you have some, too? I shall enjoy mine better, if you will.”

The tired baby had fallen asleep, and Miss Cynthia had laid him in his cradle. Seeing this a faint glimmer of something like a smile flitted over the woman’s worn face, as she poured a second cup of tea.

“I d’clare to goodness, you’d ought to be merried an’ hev young’n’s of yer own; you’ve got sech a way with ’em.”

“I—I hope—I believe God will give me a—baby to take care of some day. I should dearly love it.”

Miss Cynthia’s face burned with desperate blushes, but she looked bravely into the startled eyes which stared into hers.

“*You b’lieve—God—’ll give it to ye?*”

“Yes,” said Miss Cynthia firmly. “God wants to give us what we want—He *wants* to!”

“He don’t want to give me nothin’. I don’t git nothin’, anyhow.”

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“Did you ever ask God for anything, and—and *expect* it?”

The woman was silent for a full minute. “I don’ know as I ever did,” she admitted sullenly. “But if I was God I wouldn’t wait fer folks to ask. I’d give ’em what I see they needed—an’ a-plenty of it.”

“I asked you for the tea; should you have given it to me, if I hadn’t asked you?”

The woman threw up her hands. “God ain’t like *me!*” she shrilled.

“What is he like?”

“I don’ know. I never thought anythin’ ’bout it, nohow.”

“God wants you to think about him, and to ask him for what you want,” said Miss Cynthia, in a tone of joyful assurance. “He is our Father, and he loves us. Did you never think of that? Please think of it all the rest of to-day, and to-morrow, and ask him for something you want.”

“If I c’d on’y b’lieve the’ was any use of it,” groaned the woman, dropping her rough head upon the table. “I want s’ many things—w’y, I can’t begin to tell ye!”

“Don’t tell *me!*” whispered Miss Cynthia.

She stooped and laid her arm timidly about the woman’s shaking shoulders. “Just *try* and see,” she urged, and was gone before the woman had done sobbing out her full heart before the Father-God, who spoke to her in the silence which followed the quiet closing of the door.

“I forgot to ask her to come to the meetings,” reflected Miss Cynthia, as she tapped at another door; “but I don’t believe she needs any spiritual dynamite.”

Mrs. Schultz was vigorously scrubbing her small kitchen on hands and knees; but she stopped to welcome her visitor with a broad smile of welcome which brightened her round, red face into positive comeliness.

“I guess it’s kind of damp in here,” she said briskly, “but if you’ll set on this square of carpet, Miss Day, the rest the floor ’ll be dry in no time.”

“I came to ask you if you will come to the meetings in the Presbyterian church,” Miss Cynthia told her, with a growing sense of her mission weighing somewhat heavily upon her.

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Mrs. Schultz giggled childishly. "Land! Miss Day, I've be'n a'ready, an' I've be'n converted agin," she said complacently. "You don't ketch me stayin' away from no meetin's. Las' winter me an' Dave went 'way over t' Spratt's Corners t' the Methodist r'vival. I've got r'ligion most ev'ry winter since I was fifteen."

Miss Cynthia's blue eyes opened wide. "What—becomes of it in the summer?" she asked.

"Blest if I know," responded Mrs. Schultz cheerfully. "It seems to kind of peter out, come spring; I can't keep it a-goin', somehow; but it's awful comfortin' while it lasts."

Miss Cynthia turned this difficult matter over in her mind for some minutes. Then she relinquished it with a sigh.

"Have you been in to see Mrs. Flannery lately?" she asked.

Mrs. Schultz shook her head with tightly compressed lips. "She 's the dirtiest critter 'bout her house I ever see," she said, smoothing down her clean calico dress with conscious pride. "I wish 't they 'd move away; that's what I wish. I was tellin' Dave Schultz

this mornin', 'them Flannerys,' I says, 'is a disgrace to this neighbourhood.' An' he says he c'n fix it so 't Tim Flannery 'll git knocked out his job at the factory. He ain't no good of a hand cause he's drunk most th' time; but she 's 'nough to drive most any man to drink. She jaws so 't you c'n hear her a mile ev'ry time he comes in the house, an' this mornin' she pitched a stove-lid at 'im. 'F Tim hadn't a be'n so drunk I guess 't he'd a-killed her right in her tracks. I sh'll be mighty glad when we've got shet of 'em. All of us neighbours feels the same way. Mis' Pell an' Sarah Brown an' Delia Burke, they'll tell you so if you ask 'em. An' her young'ns is the plague o' the place, always a-snoopin' 'round under foot."

"What if you tried to help her?" asked Miss Cynthia.

"*Help her!*" Mrs. Schultz bristled with righteous indignation. "I guess I have helped her. She 's always wantin' somepin off the neighbours. I've got so 't I hate the sight of her comin' in 't the yard. I shet down on her borrowin' fer good last week."

"It's religion to help people that need helping," said Miss Cynthia distinctly.

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Her slow thoughts had finally marshalled the woman's correlated statements into their correct relation, and the solution was suddenly made plain to her. "If you won't do that, I'm afraid you'll have to keep on getting converted every winter," she added.

Mrs. Schultz stared. "What's Mis' Flannery got to do with my r'ligion?" she demanded. "She ain't got no more idee o' r'ligion 'an—'an——" Her eyes wandered vacantly in search of a simile. "She ain't got no r'ligion 't all," she concluded doggedly. "My! I was on m' knees 'most an hour in the anxious seats th' other night. You'd ought t' ha' seen me; an' I've be'n hollerin' halleloolya ever since."

Miss Cynthia's eyes were fixed unseeingly upon the row of thrifty geraniums in Mrs. Schultz's one window, which shone clear and bright in the winter sunshine.

"I don't know how to say it as I ought," she said finally, "but I feel sure that if you would *be kind* to Mrs. Flannery and help her with the baby when she is tired, and—and not *feel* as if you hated her all the while—if you would *love* her—if you only could—that would be religion. And—and God

would like it better than to have you sing any sort of a hymn."

"It is so clean and pleasant here," she went on, after a pause. "And you are so strong and comfortable looking. If she could learn to keep her house the way you do—if you could teach her; don't you think she——"

Something in these halting words touched a spring of truth in Mrs. Schultz's ample bosom. "Well, I c'n try, anyhow," she said heartily. "I guess she *doos* git 'bout beat out with all those young'ns of hern. I r'member mine us't t' pester the life out me when they was little. You're mighty good to come an' see me," she finished.

Miss Cynthia had risen. "I have done very little for other people," she faltered. "I—didn't understand that we must love one another and be kind. I am just learning."

Mrs. Schultz drew in her breath. "An' you've be'n a perfesser fer years, ain't you?" she asked wonderingly.

"Yes," acknowledged Miss Cynthia, reddening under the woman's candid eyes with a very real sense

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of shame. "That was all I was—a *professing* Christian."

"Land!" marvelled Mrs. Schultz, as she stared after her departing guest, "I guess most folks think that's 'nough to keep 'em out o' hell."

XXI

SPRING came early that year, first with rushing torrents of rain which swept the desolate earth bare of snow and ice, then with the brave voices of robins calling aloud in the frosty mornings.

Cynthia Day heard the voices as one wrapped in a dream of hard-won peace, and kneeling before her window in the pink light of dawn, smiled into the veiled face of her future. She knew at last that *life is*; that to live is not merely a matter of bodies, or of houses, or of money; and knowing this she waited tranquilly while the slow days rounded out the year of her allotted time. Not yet did she understand the greater truth of the resurrection.

Abby Whiton, hanging out freshly washed clothes of immaculate whiteness amid the rigours of a March morning, heard the adventurous robins coaxing reluctant Spring across the borderland of Winter. She came in with nipped fingers to lay one of James Blake's thick letters beside the coffee-urn at Miss Cynthia's place.

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"I guess we're a-goin' to hev a reel early spring this year," she observed, gazing at her mistress with the keen eyes of a lover.

Miss Cynthia's small face in the bright light of morning, which streamed unhindered through the clear windows, shone with the radiant whiteness of a white flower in the sun. "I hope it will be an early spring," she said. "I should like——"

She stopped to look down at the letter, and her mouth quivered.

Abby Whiton jerked her elbows with an impatient sigh. Later she slammed the dish-pan down on the kitchen table with stony composure. "Ef that Jim Blake had a mite of the gumption he us't to hev, he'd a be'n on here to see her 'fore this time," she muttered. "I'll bet I'd be up-an'-a-doin' ef *I* was sparkin'. Serve him right ef somebody else was to git her. I wonder what in creation he fin's to say in all them letters of hisn." She opened the door cautiously and peeped in.

Miss Cynthia was sitting idly by the hearth, her litile feet on the fender, her blue eyes fixed upon the smouldering logs with a far-away smile. The large

pages of James Blake's letter had fallen to the floor, and the big maltese cat was patting them experimentally in a staid, elderly fashion, faintly reminiscent of her remote kittenhood.

"Well, I mus' say!" snorted Abby, dealing the innocent cat a sound cuff, while she rescued the rustling pages. "You don't seem to keer much ef the cat doos git 'em! An' I'm sure I don' know why in creation I sh'd. I s'pose I'm a meddlesome ol' fool, anyhow."

Miss Cynthia laid hold of Abby Whiton's immaculate gingham apron. "Oh, Abby!" she said. Then she hid her face in the checked apron, as a child would hide its face on its mother's shoulder.

"Fer the lan's sake, Miss Cynthy!" expostulated Abby, in wild-eyed consternation; "don't ye git to takin' on now, er I shell hev to dash upstairs fer the camphire."

"He wants to come and see me the last week—in April," murmured Miss Cynthia from the depths of the checked apron, "and I—I don't know what to say to him."

"Well, I want-ta-know!" intoned Abby strongly.

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“I sh’d say that was easy es rollin’ off a log. You either want t’ see him, er ye don’t. Come right down to it, I’ll bet the’ ain’t anythin’ you want more. Ef I was you I sh’d write an’ tell him ’at I’d be pleased to see him at m’ res’dunce any day he’ll name.”

Miss Cynthia breathed a long sigh. “Perhaps that would be best,” she said faintly. “I—can’t tell him anything different.”

“I sh’d say not!” chimed in Miss Whiton triumphantly. “Well——” She stopped short and eyed the small figure in the chair with critical eyes. “Ef I was you, I sh’d git some new dresses made up, right off. The’ ain’t much time to lose. You want to look es well es ye kin when he comes. I’d git a-holt of Malvina Bennett first off, fore anybody else cuts in ahead of ye.”

“I don’t think I—shall need any new dresses this spring,” said Miss Cynthia.

One of the adventurous robins had settled in the old apple tree just outside the window and was carolling a lusty defiance to the large, wet snow-flakes which were falling from the gray heavens like the soft folds of a bridal veil.

Miss Cynthia arose and walked over to the window. The robin darted away through the snow with a jubilant cry of courage.

"That's an awful good sign," said Abby Whiton, looking over her mistress' shoulder. "Not 'at I b'lieve in signs; I never think nothin' 'bout seein' the moon over my' lef' shoulder, the way some foolish folks do. But I do like to see m' first robin high up, fer luck. An' ef he flies whilst you're a-lookin' at him, he'd ought to fly high. But ef you see him down on the ground, er ef he flies down, it's a sure sign of a come-down in the world. I never knew it t' fail. I guess you're a-goin' higher this year. I hope to goodness you be, anyhow."

Miss Cynthia turned suddenly and looked the old woman full in the face. "Am I too old to wear a white dress, Abby?" she asked.

"Not a mite!" cried Abby. "I like 'em myself fer 'most anybody. W'y land! Mis' Buckthorn had one made up las' summer an' wore it constant. I guess ef she c'n——"

"I want a real pretty one," Miss Cynthia went on thoughtfully. "It must be made of something soft

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and shining, with lovely lace; not stiff or ugly, like— Oh, I do want to look pretty when—when he sees me. I want him to remember me—that way.”

“I’ll bet he’ll remember the way you look well ’nough,” said Abby, intent upon her own joyous, if unaccustomed, thoughts. “Don’t you worry a mite ’bout that!”

So it came to pass that Malvina Bennett almost prayerfully cut into shining breadths of silvery, silken tissue. And Abby Whiton scrubbed the floors and shelves of her kitchen to a bridal whiteness, and examined her stores of pickles and preserves with a provident eye.

“I d’clare, this ’ere goods looks ’most like a weddin - dress, come to make it up,” ventured Miss Bennett in a timid whisper; this, while she reverently applied a warm iron to the long seams of the skirt.

“It doos look consid’able like it,” admitted Abby Whiton dryly. “But I guess it ain’t fer you ner me t’ say what ’tis for.”

But there were no other dresses made, and the white gown when completed was quietly folded away in the spare-room closet.

One day, when a warm, caressing wind was coaxing the last dead leaves from the old apple tree in the garden, the Puffer twins brought Miss Cynthia a tiny bunch of arbutus buds, pink as a baby's palm and fragrant with the ineffable incense of resurrection. "We found 'em way up in the woods, all covered up with dead leaves an' pine needles," exclaimed Edwina, "an' we brought 'em to you because we love you."

And Miss Cynthia, stooping to kiss their round, freckled faces with heartfelt gratitude was glad of all that happened in her past. It had been a strangely quiet, uneventful life, frozen and pinched and colourless in its earlier years, but crowned with innocent love and happiness at the last, and passing sweet like the wild fragrance of the arbutus.

"I have had everything to make me happy this year," she whispered to herself, "everything, and I am not afraid!"

The still undercurrent of her thoughts lent a touching dignity and peace to her gentle presence. The poor and sick in Innisfield—and they were many—touched her small hand with longing, and blessed her with dimmed eyes.

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The teasing, persistent little pain had left her long since. But of this she thought but seldom. She thought only that it was—April, and she was not afraid.

The frogs were peeping loud in the distant marshes and the willows wove golden arabesques against the warm blue of the sky the day that Rosalie Scott found Miss Cynthia once more walking on the upland road. The girl's face shone with a great and satisfying joy which added the last charm to her vivid beauty.

"I have been lonely this winter," she confessed; "but I have learned my lesson, and—it is not too late. I want to thank you for—telling me what you did, Miss Cynthia."

"Has George Blossom come home?" asked Miss Cynthia directly, and read the answer to her question in the girl's happy eyes.

"It will be a long time, of course," Rosalie told her shyly. "But we shan't mind that now that we know we—love each other. Mother didn't like it very well at first. But father says George is just the sort of a man he likes. Of course mother always thinks

just as father does, and now she—we all—are very happy.” The girl stooped to kiss Miss Cynthia, with all the warmth of her newly learned lessons in loving.

The long, soft twilight of April had settled like gray, brooding wings over the village by the time Miss Cynthia entered her own door.

Someone was waiting for her in the cheerful circle of the firelight. He turned at her approach and looked at her with his kind, boyish, brown eyes. “Will you be angry with me because I came sooner than I said?” he asked. “I couldn’t wait, dear.”

“I—I am not angry,” faltered Miss Cynthia. “I think I am—glad.” But she shrank away from his eager arms in piteous, white alarm. “I—ought to have told you before!” she cried out. “I have been cruel—unkind!” Her voice broke into a tremulous wail of pain and longing.

“You must tell me now,” he said in a low, determined voice. He took her cold hands in both his own and held them in a firm, warm clasp. “You will tell me—at once.”

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Then she told him, in short, disjointed sentences. "It was only—one year," she finished, "and the year is—almost over. I am not afraid—I am not afraid. But oh, *I want to live!*"

He asked her one brief question—the name of the Boston physician—in a strangely altered voice. His face had grown stern and quiet. He bent his tall head and listened to her heart-beats, checking her startled exclamation with an authoritative word and gesture.

Then he drew her strongly to him. "Thank God!" he breathed. She felt a man's awful tears upon her upturned face. His lips brushed them away.

"You will not die," he said. "My little June Day—mine at last!"

Abby Whiton explained matters to Mrs. Nellie Ryan Cartright with joyous garrulity in the kitchen that same evening. "Yes, they're a-goin' to git married right off. The' ain't an airthly thing to hender. 'My!' I says to her, 'ain't it lucky you've got that han'some white dress all made up. I was thinkin' to m'self all along it was jest the thing fer a weddin'-

'dress.' But Miss Cynthy, she says she's goin' to be married in her trav'lin'-dress. It doos beat all! But I don't s'pose the doctor'd care ef she stood up in a gingham apern.

"What! didn't I tell ye that Jim Blake's a doctor? Well, he is, an' makin' money han' over fist out west. I guess she'll git took keer of f'om now on. I never see anythin' like the way he looks at her. You'd think she was made out o' di'mun's. Of course I'm goin' west with 'em. Miss Cynthy says she couldn't git 'long without me, nohow."

In the privacy of the kitchen pantry, by the flour barrel which had served as an effectual altar for her many fervent petitions, Abby Whiton returned thanks in a jubilant whisper. "She's in there a-laughin' with *him* this minute, O, Lord! I kin hear 'em, an' it doos soun' happy an' contented clear through. I'm s' glad an' s' thankful I don' know what t' do, ner what t' say. But, O Lord, I guess mebbe, seein' 'at you understood all along how it was with Miss Cynthy, you'll understan' me now, without my sayin' no more. Amen!"

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